

THE TRANSNISTRIA'S ETHNIC GERMANS AND THE HOLOCAUST, 1941-1942

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ABSTRACT

ERIC CONRAD STEINHART: The Transnistria's Ethnic Germans and the Holocaust,
1941-1942

(Under the direction of Christopher R. Browning)

In the eyes of Nazi Germany, the ethnic Germans or *die Volksdeutschen*—people of German ancestry who lived beyond the prewar borders of the German state—inhabited an ambiguous racial territory. Because the SS alone controlled the ethnic German settlements in the Transnistria, a region that encompasses much of present-day Moldova and western Ukraine, it was able to enact radical policies that constricted the decision-making space in which ethnic Germans chose to become Holocaust perpetrators. In contrast to their endangered position under Soviet rule, those ethnic Germans who supported the Transnistria's new Nazi order received material rewards from their SS overlords. But those ethnic Germans whom the SS found politically and racially objectionable felt the regime's unrestrained brutality. Using both German and Soviet sources, this thesis examines the relationship between this exceptional context and the crimes of the Transnistria's ethnic German auxiliary police during the winter of 1941-42.

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CHAPTER I INTRODUCTION

During the winter of 1941-42, the ethnic German auxiliary police murdered more than 35,000 victims in the Transnistria, including much of Odessa's once extensive Jewish population.¹ The region's estimated 130,000 ethnic Germans or *die Volksdeutschen*—people of German ethnicity who lived beyond the prewar borders of the German state—played a crucial role in the Nazi regime's genocidal plans in the Soviet Union.² Perhaps nowhere was their contribution as central as in the Transnistria, an area that encompasses much of present-day Moldova and western Ukraine. Although the region's Volksdeutsche had no particular historical affinity for Germany, after a matter of months under German occupation, a disproportionate number of them joined in murdering the Third Reich's racial and political enemies in large numbers. In addition to providing crucial manpower for the Final Solution, during two and a half years of occupation these Volksdeutschen communities were focal points of the SS's (*Schutzstaffel*) effort to transform distant villages into colonial outposts of its planned Aryan utopia in Eastern Europe. Creating the SS's racial paradise involved implementing two coeval projects. First, the Transnistria's SS administrators murdered a racially and politically suspect

¹ Jean Ancel, *Transnistria, 1941-1942: The Romanian Mass Murder Campaigns*, trans. Rachel Garfinkel and Karen Gold, 3 vols., vol. 1 (Tel Aviv: The Goldstein-Goren Diaspora Research Center, Tel Aviv University, 2003), 292.

² National Archives Microfilm Publication T175, roll 72, frame 2589159. (Hereafter T175/72/2589159.)

Volksdeutsche minority. Second, the SS created an impressive welfare administration for the majority of the area's ethnic Germans. How did these apparently countervailing initiatives shape the Holocaust in the Transnistria? How did German policy influence the apparent willingness of the Transnistria's Volksdeutschen to take up arms against and to murder the Nazi regime's racial and political enemies? And most importantly, how does the context in which ethnic Germans decided to kill inform our understanding of Holocaust perpetrators? In responding to these issues, the present thesis attempts not only to further scholarship on the Volksdeutschen during the Third Reich, but also addresses the unique role that ethnic German murderers played in the Holocaust in the Soviet Union.

The answers to these questions, in large measure, rest upon the relationship between Volksdeutsche perpetrators and their Nazi masters. While recent scholarship on Eastern European murderers provides useful insights into Volksdeutsche killers, it fails to consider the impact of their special position in the Nazi racial hierarchy.³ As the works of Doris Bergen, Ingeborg Fleischhauer, and Valdis O. Lumans illustrate, Nazi Germany never viewed ethnic Germans as wholly racially acceptable.⁴ On the one hand, since the

³ For a discussion of the uniquely personal dimension to mass murder and the Holocaust in Eastern Europe, see Martin Dean, *Collaboration in the Holocaust: Crimes of the Local Police in Belorussia and Ukraine, 1941-44* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2000), viii. Christoph Dieckmann's recently edited volume, *Kooperation und Verbrechen*, suggests that Eastern Europeans cooperated with German authorities largely out of self-interest. Although his distinction between collaboration and cooperation is useful in discussing Eastern European perpetrators, it does not take into consideration the Volksdeutschen who sought immediate gains from Nazi Germany's new order. Christoph Dieckmann, *Kooperation und Verbrechen: Formen der "Kollaboration" im östlichen Europa 1939-1945, Beiträge zur Geschichte des Nationalsozialismus; Bd. 19* (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2003), 9-21.

⁴ Doris L. Bergen, "The Nazi Concept of 'Volksdeutsche' and the Exacerbation of Anti-Semitism in Eastern Europe, 1939-45," *Journal of Contemporary History* 29, no. 4 (1994): 573.; Ingeborg Fleischhauer, *Das Dritte Reich und die Deutschen in der Sowjetunion, Schriftenreihe der Vierteljahrshefte für Zeitgeschichte; Nr. 46* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, 1983), 68-72.; Valdis O. Lumans, *Himmler's*

beginning of the twentieth century, Pan-Germanists saw Eastern European Volksdeutsche as the bulwark of a potential German empire in the East. Prior to and during the Second World War, the Nazi regime “resettled” hundreds of thousands of ethnic Germans from Eastern Europe to the Greater German Reich and actively recruited them for service in military and auxiliary forces.⁵ On the other hand, using malleable and imprecise definitions, the Nazis racially categorized ethnic Germans as a means of culling the most desirable Aryan specimens.⁶ Ethnic Germans whom the Nazi regime found racially or politically objectionable were subject to the loss of property rights, imprisonment, and even extermination. The Transnistria’s Volksdeutschen were particularly problematic for the Nazis, because for centuries they had lived among, intermarried with, and assumed the customs of their supposedly inferior Slavic and even Jewish neighbors. Thus, within this schizophrenic Nazi worldview, the regime regarded the Volksdeutschen, and particularly those in the Transnistria, as simultaneously desirable and suspect.

Given the peculiar position of ethnic Germans within the Nazi racial hierarchy, conventional scholarship on Holocaust perpetrators does little to explain this distinctive

Auxiliaries: The Volksdeutsche Mittelstelle and the German National Minorities of Europe, 1933-1945 (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1993), 72.

⁵ Lumans provides the most comprehensive English-language discussion of Nazi Volksdeutsche “resettlement” policy. Lumans. *Himmler’s Auxiliaries*. Götz Aly aptly notes that the term “resettlement,” as opposed to settlement, is a product of Nazi ideology. Götz Aly, *‘Final Solution’: Nazi Population Policy and the Murder of the European Jews*, trans. Belinda Cooper and Allison Brown (London: Arnold, 1999), 11.

⁶ Doris Bergen’s 1994 article provides important insight into the tenuous nature of the Nazi definition of an ethnic German. Bergen. “The Nazi Concept of ‘Volksdeutsche.’”

group of killers.⁷ Although an extensive body of literature examines the role of ethnic Germans during the Second World War, it generally debates the extent to which they were a “fifth column” for Hitler’s Germany, rather than analyzes their unique dynamic as perpetrators.⁸ Moreover, due to its focus on German killers, much of the seminal Holocaust scholarship does little to explain the context in which numerous ethnic Germans decided to kill.⁹ In their examination of German perpetrator cohorts, many scholars therefore correctly dismiss the conventional postwar perpetrators’ claim that they were coerced into participating in the Holocaust.¹⁰ While it is clear that no German

⁷ Doris L. Bergen, “The *Volksdeutsche* of Eastern Europe and the Collapse of the Nazi Empire, 1944-1945,” in *The Impact of Nazism: New Perspectives on the Third Reich and Its Legacy*, ed. Alan E. Steinweis and Daniel E. Rogers (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2003), 103-5.

⁸ Louis De Jong wrote the classic work on this topic. Louis De Jong, *The German Fifth Column in the Second World War*, trans. C.M. Geyl (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1956), 295-97. Meir Buschweiler and Valdis Lumans provide more nuanced understandings of ethnic Germans as a “Fifth Column” by suggesting that one can only apply the label to certain circumstances. Meir Buchsweiler, *Volksdeutsche in der Ukraine am Vorabend und Beginn des Zweiten Weltkriegs--ein Fall doppelter Loyalität?* trans. Ruth Achlama (Tel-Aviv: Schriftenreihe des Instituts für Deutsche Geschichte, Universität Tel-Aviv, 1984), 384. Lumans, *Himmler's Auxiliaries*, 80, 87. Given the imprecision of these categories, Richard Blanke perhaps correctly dismisses the entire debate as irrelevant. Richard Blanke, “The German Minority in Inter-War Poland and German Foreign Policy -- Some Reconsiderations,” *Journal of Contemporary History* 25, no. 1 (1990): 97. For an interesting East German perspective on the debate concerning the *Volksdeutschen* as a “Fifth Column” see Eva Seeber, “Der Anteil der Minderheitsorganisation ‘Selbstschutz’ an den faschistischen Vernichtungsaktionen im Herbst und Winter 1939 in Polen,” *Jahrbuch für Geschichte der sozialistischen Länder Europas* 13, no. 2 (1969): 3-34.

⁹ Christopher R. Browning offers a social psychological explanation for mass murder. Christopher R. Browning, *Ordinary Men: Reserve Police Battalion 101 and the Final Solution in Poland*, 2nd ed. (New York: HarperPerennial, 1998), 159-223. By contrast, Daniel Jonah Goldhagen argues that perpetrators killed solely because of a fervent and particularly violent anti-Semitism. Daniel Jonah Goldhagen, *Hitler's Willing Executioners: Ordinary Germans and the Holocaust*, 1st ed. (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1996), 9. Herbert Welzer attempts to remedy some of Goldhagen’s limitation, but by virtue of focusing on Germany, provides an explanation that is limited to perpetrators socialized in the German national political context. Harold Welzer, *Täter: Wie aus ganz normalen Menschen Massenmörder werden* (Frankfurt: S. Fischer Verlag, 2005).

¹⁰ For example, both Christopher R. Browning and Daniel Jonah Goldhagen studied a unit in which the commanding officer explicitly offered his troops the option of not participating. As Browning notes, “in the past forty-five years no defense attorney or defendant in any of the hundreds of postwar trials has been able to document a single case in which refusing to obey an order to kill unarmed civilians resulted in the

perpetrator committed murder under duress in a strictly legal sense, SS policy in the Transnistria ensured that the area's Volksdeutschen decided to kill within a fundamentally different situation.

Although a number of works examine ethnic German communities in the Soviet Union and specifically in Ukraine during the Second World War, they neither typically focus on the Holocaust, nor make significant use of postwar judicial records.¹¹ Those works that do address ethnic German auxiliaries during the Holocaust, such as Christian Jansen and Arno Weckbecker's study of the *Volksdeutschen Selbstschutz* (ethnic German militia) in Poland, as well as Thomas Casagrande's recent examination of the Waffen-SS's "Prinz Eugen" Division in Yugoslavia, do not address ethnic German perpetrators in the Soviet Union.¹² Similarly, while Götz Aly's inquiry into the relationship between Nazi ethnic German population policy and the Final Solution highlights an important connection between the two initiatives, he does not specifically examine crimes committed by Volksdeutschen.¹³ Moreover, although the German-occupied Soviet Union, and

allegedly inevitable dire punishment." Browning, *Ordinary Men*, 170. This is not to suggest that ethnic Germans perpetrated their crimes under direct fear of punishment. Like German perpetrators, no evidence indicates that threat of direct physical harm was a motivating factor for Volksdeutsche Holocaust perpetrators.

¹¹ Although Fleischhauer addresses the Holocaust, it is neither the central focus of her work, nor does she marshal extensive judicial evidence. Fleischhauer, *Das Dritte Reich und die Deutschen in der Sowjetunion*. Similarly, Buchsweiler's study, whose account does not go beyond the initial few months of the German occupation, focuses primarily on the daily life of ethnic Germans under Soviet and German rule. Buchsweiler, *Volksdeutsche in der Ukraine*.

¹² Christian Jansen and Arno Weckbecker, *Der "Volksdeutsche Selbstschutz" in Polen 1939/40* (Munich: Oldenbourg, 1992). Thomas Casagrande, *Die volksdeutsche SS-Division "Prinz Eugen": die Banater Schwaben und die nationalsozialistischen Kriegsverbrechen* (Frankfurt: Campus-Verlag, 2003).

¹³ Aly, 'Final Solution.'

specifically Ukraine, are hotbeds of current research, few of these new works focus on the specific role that the region's Volksdeutschen played in the course of the Holocaust.¹⁴ Despite the fact that Jean Ancel's examination of the Holocaust in the Romanian-occupied Transnistria, Andrej Angrick's study of Einsatzgruppe D, and Wendy Lower's work on Nazi imperialism in Ukraine note the prominent part that ethnic Germans played in the Final Solution, they all focus on the region's German or Romanian rulers rather than on the Volksdeutschen themselves.¹⁵ Thus, while emerging scholarship has raised a number of interesting questions about the role of ethnic Germans in the Holocaust in the Soviet Union, none of it attempts to examine specifically the unique role of the Volksdeutschen in carrying out the Final Solution.

Using postwar Soviet and West German judicial interrogations (see Appendix), as well as contemporary German documents, this thesis endeavors to reconstruct how the

¹⁴ With the opening of archives in the former Soviet Union fifteen years ago, historians have turned their attention to the role of Eastern European perpetrators in bringing about the Holocaust in the Soviet Union. Recent scholarship, like that of Karel Berkhoff, Bernhard Chiari, Martin Dean, Christoph Dieckmann, Christian Gerlach, Shimon Redlich, and Timothy Snyder now provides a nuanced view of the crucial contribution of non-German Holocaust perpetrators in the Soviet Union. Although these works are of exceptional quality, few of these studies focus on the decisive role of the Volksdeutschen in bringing about the Holocaust in the Soviet Union. While Berkhoff, for example, refers to ethnic Germans in Ukraine, he bases most of his information on Buchseiler. See Karel C. Berkhoff, *Harvest of Despair: Life and Death in Ukraine under Nazi Rule* (Cambridge, MA.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2004).; Bernhard Chiari, *Alltag hinter der Front: Besatzung, Kollaboration und Widerstand in Weissrussland 1941-1944*, *Schriften des Bundesarchivs*; 53 (Düsseldorf: Droste Verlag, 1998).; Dean, *Collaboration in the Holocaust: Crimes of the Local Police in Belorussia and Ukraine, 1941-44.*; Dieckmann, *Kooperation und Verbrechen: Formen der "Kollaboration" im östlichen Europa 1939-1945.*; Christian Gerlach, *Kalkulierte Morde: Die deutsche Wirtschafts- und Vernichtungspolitik in Weißrußland 1941 bis 1944* (Hamburg: Hamburger Edition, 1999).; Shimon Redlich, *Together and Apart in Brzezany: Poles, Jews, and Ukrainians, 1919-1945* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2002).; and Timothy Snyder, *The Reconstruction of Nations: Poland, Ukraine, Lithuania, Belarus, 1569-1999* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003).

¹⁵ Ancel, *Transnistria, 1941-1942*. Andrej Angrick, *Besatzungspolitik und Massenmord: Die Einsatzgruppe D in der südlichen Sowjetunion 1941-1943* (Hamburg: Hamburger Edition, 2003). Wendy Lower, *Nazi Empire-Building and the Holocaust in Ukraine* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 2005).

Transnistria's Volksdeutsche auxiliary police became involved in the Final Solution and why an extraordinarily high proportion of the region's ethnic Germans chose to commit murder. The crimes of the Transnistria's Volksdeutsche auxiliary police resulted from an intersection of Romania's and Germany's parallel "wars of destruction." The reason why the SS used the Volksdeutschen auxiliary police as killing personnel was a direct response to Romanian policy. As a consequence of its own genocidal anti-Jewish policy and in explicit contravention of stated German wishes in late 1941 and early 1942, the Ion Antonescu regime (1940-44) deported Odessa's remaining Jewish population to the nearby ethnic German settlements. Because of the horrific conditions in which Romanian authorities had housed Odessa's Jews, many deportees suffered from typhus and thereby threatened to spread the epidemic to the area's Volksdeutschen and to nearby German military units. In the context of the SS's murderous racial worldview, the only solution to the public health dilemma created by their Romanian allies was to murder the Jewish typhus carriers. Put simply, the deportation policies pursued by Romanian officials prompted the SS and its local ethnic German helpers to solve the Jewish "problem" for them.

Although Romanian policy triggered the involvement of the Transnistria's ethnic German auxiliary police in the Final Solution, the overarching situational factors created by the region's SS overlords provides a crucial background for understanding why the local Volksdeutschen chose to become mass murderers. Because the SS exercised virtually unrestrained control in the Transnistria's Volksdeutschen communities, it was able to establish Nazi rule by fusing two distinct but related projects with a physical and chronological intensity greater than anything the regime attempted in Germany. While

Nazi officials created their new order by brutally repressing a small politically and racially suspect minority among the Volksdeutschen, they also sought to construct an impressive welfare system for the majority of the Transnistria's ethnic German inhabitants.¹⁶ The region's SS rulers thus telescoped policies that the Nazis had enacted piecemeal over the course of years in Germany into the span of weeks, days, and even hours in the Transnistria. In contrast to the uniquely intense Volksdeutsche anti-Semitic context that scholars conventionally highlight, the Transnistria's ethnic Germans appear to have been unusually integrated with local Jews. In particular, as indicated by the SS's radical stance toward mixed Jewish-Volksdeutsche families, the Transnistria's Nazi rulers enforced a uniquely rigid and brutal racial policy. The ferocity of SS rule thus created a constricted decision-making space for local ethnic Germans by making the penalties for recalcitrance and the rewards for cooperation much more visible, immediate, and severe than was the case for any German.

¹⁶ Based on his case study of Nordheim, a town in Niedersachsen, William Sheridan Allen highlights the fact that the Nazi regime gained power in Germany both by repressing its political enemies and by providing material gains to the majority of Germans. William Sheridan Allen, *The Nazi Seizure of Power: The Experience of a Single German Town, 1922-1945*, Rev. ed. (New York: F. Watts, 1984). Although perhaps somewhat overstating the evidence, Götz Aly highlights the importance of material rewards for the German public in facilitating the Holocaust. Götz Aly, *Hitlers Volksstaat: Raub, Rassenkrieg und nationaler Sozialismus* (Frankfurt: S. Fischer Verlag, 2005).

CHAPTER II

THE ETHNIC GERMAN AUXILIARY POLICE AND THE HOLOCAUST

The Ethnic Germans of the Transnistria

Taking advantage of tax remunerations, military service exemptions, assurances of religious freedom, and other incentives initiated by Catherine the Great, German-speaking people—now known as the Black Sea Germans—settled the area immediately to the north of Odessa between 1804 and 1810.¹⁷ Like their counterparts who relocated to the New World, German émigrés in the Russian Empire sought both freedom from religious persecution and poverty.¹⁸ Although the Volksdeutschen of the Transnistria—defined technically as the Kutschurgan enclave—were predominately Catholic, they encompassed a high-proportion of religious minorities, such as Mennonites, as well as Lutherans and Baptists.¹⁹ During the nineteenth century, like their counterparts across European Russia, the ethnic Germans of the Transnistria prospered in agriculture. Prior to the Russian Revolution, the Volksdeutschen of Ukraine owned and farmed between

¹⁷ *Archivgut der Zentralen Stelle der Landesjustizverwaltung* 2315/5 (Hereafter *Barch B* 162). Buchsweiler, 109.

¹⁸ Fleischhauer, *Das Dritte Reich und die Deutschen in der Sowjetunion*, 10-11.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 118. Eric J. Schmaltz and Samuel Sinner, "The Nazi Ethnographic Research of Georg Leibbrandt and Karl Stumpp in Ukraine, and Its North American Legacy," *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* 14, no. 1 (2000): 34.

40,000 and 45,000 square kilometers—an area approximately one and a half times the size of the state of Maryland.²⁰ In the countryside surrounding Odessa the ethnic Germans, who comprised 7 percent of property owners at the beginning of the twentieth century, owned approximately 60 percent of the land.²¹ Living in noncontiguous settlements that dotted the region outside of Odessa, the Volksdeutschen inhabited largely ethnically homogeneous Germanophone villages prior to 1917.²² Notwithstanding their linguistic and cultural heritage, as the prosperous descendants of religious and economic exiles, the Black Sea Germans, like much of the German-speaking population of the Russian Empire, felt little particular attraction to their ancestors' erstwhile homeland.²³

If the Russian Empire's ethnic Germans grew increasingly distant from Germany, by virtue of their geographic and economic position, they became increasingly interesting to German ultranationalists at the dawn of the twentieth century—a pattern that would continue until 1945. As early as 1905, Pan-Germanists looked to Russian Volksdeutsche as a potential fifth column in a future war of expansion in the East. Although only noble and upper bourgeois ethnic Germans in the Baltic shared this affinity prior to 1914, at the

²⁰ According to the 1897 census, more than half of the Russian Empire's German-speaking population worked in agriculture, and by 1914, they farmed over thirty-five million acres of land—equivalent to 43 percent of the arable land in the German Empire. Fleischhauer, *Das Dritte Reich und die Deutschen in der Sowjetunion*, 12. Throughout the nineteenth and the twentieth centuries, the overwhelming majority of Russian ethnic Germans were rural. Polian argues that of the 1.4 million Soviet ethnic Germans prior to the Second World War, only 20 percent lived in urban areas. Pavel Polian, *Against Their Will: The History and Geography of Forced Migrations in the USSR*, trans. Anna Yastrzhembaska (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2004), 126.

²¹ Buchsweiler, *Volksdeutsche in der Ukraine*, 121.

²² *Ibid.*, 111.

²³ Fleischhauer, *Das Dritte Reich und die Deutschen in der Sowjetunion*, 11.

beginning of the First World War the tsarist government took repressive measures against all Volksdeutschen living along the western edges of the Empire.²⁴ Russian fears about the loyalty of their ethnic German community were realized, at least in part, during the brief German occupation of the Russia Empire at the end of the First World War. In pursuing a policy of Pan-German expansion, German forces established and armed an ethnic German militia force to guard the Volksdeutschen against violence from local Slavs.²⁵ As the German Empire disintegrated, many nationalistic Volksdeutschen fled Russia with the German army.²⁶ In subsequent decades, this cohort of ultranationalist ethnic Germans would form both one of the intellectual antecedents to National Socialism, as well as a disproportionate number of the specialized personnel trusted to carry out Nazi Germany's "war of annihilation" in the Soviet Union.²⁷

²⁴ Ibid., 14, 17-22, 23. Also see, Eric Lohr, *Nationalizing the Russian Empire: The Campaign against Enemy Aliens During World War I* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003).

²⁵ Buchsweiler, *Volksdeutsche in der Ukraine*, 118-19.

²⁶ Fleischhauer, *Das Dritte Reich und die Deutschen in der Sowjetunion*, 26-27, 32-34.

²⁷ As Ingeborg Fleischauer aptly argues, this cohort of primarily Baltic ethnic Germans had a profound impact on shaping the agenda of the Nazi Party. For example, Alfred Rosenberg, a Volksdeutscher from Tallinn, was one of the chief ideologues of the Nazi Party. Furthermore, *Wirtschaftspolitischen Aufbau-Korrespondenz über Ostfragen und ihre Bedeutung für Deutschland*, written by another Baltic ethnic German, Max von Scheubner-Richter, had an important impact on Adolf Hitler's conception of *Lebensraum* in Russia. Ibid., 36-40. The complicity of ethnic Germans born in the Russian Empire, however, was not limited to the intellectual realm. Both Dr. Georg Leibbrandt, who represented the Ministry for the Occupied Eastern Territories at the Wannsee Conference, and Dr. Karl Stumpp, who led a special command (*Sonderkommando*) that conducted racial-biological and statistical surveys of occupied Ukraine, were both born near Odessa. Schmaltz and Sinner, "The Nazi Ethnographic Research of Georg Leibbrandt and Karl Stumpp in Ukraine." For a discussion concerning the Nazi skepticism about the quality of ethnic Germans in the Soviet Union see Fleischhauer, *Das Dritte Reich und die Deutschen in der Sowjetunion*, 54.

For the majority of ethnic Germans who remained in the Soviet Union, and specifically in Ukraine, the bloody civil war and subsequent collectivization campaign led to widespread suffering, destruction, and loss of life. Notwithstanding some measure of cultural autonomy that the Soviet authorities granted ethnic Germans, their general living conditions from 1917 until 1941 plummeted.²⁸ First, because of their extensive landholdings under the tsarist regime, Soviet officials disproportionately identified Ukrainian ethnic Germans as kulaks. Despite the fact that Volksdeutsche comprised less than 2 percent of Ukraine's population, they accounted for some 15 percent of all kulaks.²⁹ As a result, Soviet authorities deported large numbers of ethnic Germans during the course of "dekulakization."³⁰ Second, like their Ukrainian neighbors, the ethnic Germans suffered from mass starvation during the Great Famine of 1932-33, which was particularly severe in western Soviet Ukraine, and claimed the lives of 10 percent of Ukraine's population.³¹ If the statistical information collected by the SS is any indication, the social dislocation that the Volksdeutschen of Ukraine experienced in the

²⁸ Buschweiler argues that although some ethnic Germans hoped to establish cultural autonomy under Soviet rule, most Volksdeutschen became quickly disenchanted with the Soviet system. Buchsweiler, *Volksdeutsche in der Ukraine*, 135.

²⁹ Ibid., 222. Although Kate Brown notes that the deportation orders issued by Soviet administrators initially did not specify national criteria and continued to use the language of class treason, she nevertheless illustrates how deportation authorities applied these definitions to individuals that the regime classified as Germans. Kate Brown, *A Biography of No Place: From Ethnic Borderland to Soviet Heartland* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004), 133.

³⁰ Buchsweiler, *Volksdeutsche in der Ukraine*, 223.

³¹ Berkhoff, *Harvest of Despair*, 8.

decade and a half prior to the Second World War was tremendous.³² Out of a total ethnic German population of 313,305, German occupation authorities estimated that the Soviets deported over 51,000 Volksdeutsche—roughly 16 percent of the population—in various campaigns during the 1930s.³³ Although the speed of the German advance in 1941 prevented Soviet authorities from forcibly relocating many of the Transnistria’s ethnic Germans, the SS nevertheless estimated that Soviet forces deported over 7,500 ethnic Germans out of a population of 130,000—approximately one in twenty.³⁴ In addition, one in sixty ethnic German children in the Transnistria was orphaned and thus registered as a ward of German occupation authorities.³⁵ As one Volksdeutscher recounted in his 1962 statement to West German investigators:

I attended the primary school in my home village and, as soon as I finished, I had to work in agriculture for the Russians. As a result, I could not learn a trade. Before the German invasion, I hid from the Russians to avoid the risk of being

³² For a discussion of the seemingly indiscriminate violence launched against Soviet citizens by Soviet security services in the late summer of 1941 see *Ibid.*

³³ “Zusammenstellung: der aufgebauten kulturellen Einrichtungen von Sonderkommando ‘R’.” T175/72/2589157, 2589167. Although caution is necessary when employing SS-collected demographic information, the authors circulated copies of their reports to Heinrich Himmler. If the authors were intentionally deceiving Berlin about the condition of Ukraine’s ethnic Germans, the authors would have likely attempted to mitigate the social dislocation within the community. As a number of factions within the Nazi hierarchy were skeptical about the viability of Soviet ethnic Germans as the vanguard for the new Nazi order in the East, it was to the advantage of the authors, who operated in Ukraine, to show the strength of the communities in order to support their own work. Schmaltz and Sinner: “The Nazi Ethnographic Research of Georg Liebbrandt and Karl Stumpp in Ukraine,” 47.

³⁴ T175/72/2589157, 2589167. As one ethnic German from the Transnistria indicated to investigators, many ethnic Germans hid following the invasion of the Soviet Union in order to avoid deportation. *Barch*, B 162/2297/7. As Berkhoff notes, one of the reasons for the speed of the German advance was a general unwillingness of the Soviet population to take up arms in defense of the regime. Berkhoff, *Harvest of Despair*, 12-13.

³⁵ *Ibid.*

deported. After the German Army came in fall 1941, we received our land back and were permitted to work for ourselves again.³⁶

Put simply, even before the German invasion, the Transnistria's Volksdeutschen were an embattled community that sought any relief from Soviet authorities.

If their suffering under Soviet rule embittered many Volksdeutschen toward the Soviet state, the last days of Soviet rule ignited the embers of ethnic German discontent. The Red Army's brutal retreat and the Soviet repression of the Volksdeutschen, as exemplified by Stalin's August 1941 order to deport the Volga Germans, cut any remaining affinity that members of the community may still have felt toward the Soviet Union. Within this context, many future ethnic German perpetrators suffered personally.³⁷ Some of the Transnistria's ethnic Germans sought revenge even before German forces arrived. For example, as the Red Army retreated through the Volksdeutsche village of Worms, a Volksdeutsche settlement approximately seventy-five kilometers northwest of Nikolaev, a local forty-year-old ethnic German dairy worker opened fire on the retreating soldiers with a rifle from the roof of his house.³⁸ This futile and likely foolish attack by the town's future mayor even before the arrival of German forces illustrates the pent-up hostility that many ethnic Germans felt toward the Soviet regime. Thus, while the Transnistria's Volksdeutschen were not uniquely attracted to Germany prior to the First World War, they generally greeted the arrival of German

³⁶ *Barch*, B 162/2297/7.

³⁷ One former ethnic German auxiliary policeman from Rastadt, for example, recounted how Soviet authorities had deported his father in 1933. *Barch*, B 162/2315/105.

³⁸ *Barch*, B 162/2313/142-3.

troops, as did many of their Ukrainian neighbors, as liberators from the yoke of Soviet oppression.

Special Command Russia and the Transnistria

While *völkish* thinkers and ethnic German immigrants continued to include the Soviet Volksdeutschen in their plans for *Lebensraum* in the East during the interwar period, the Second World War brought the role of ethnic Germans to the fore.³⁹ In October 1939, Hitler appointed Heinrich Himmler as Reich Commissar for the Strengthening of Germanism (*Reichskommissar für die Festigung deutschen Volkstums*), and charged him with three tasks.⁴⁰ First, he was to retrieve all Volksdeutschen living abroad and “repatriate” them to the Greater German Reich. Second, he was to purify the German *Volk* by expunging harmful biological and political elements. Third, he was to supervise the resettlement of ethnic Germans in Eastern Europe in order to strengthen Germany’s claims to these lands.⁴¹ For Himmler, Volksdeutsche were thus the beneficiaries of the new Nazi order, a racially and politically suspect population for the SS to classify and to “cleanse” through selection and murder, as well as an invaluable source of accomplices.

³⁹ As Fleischhauer illustrates, German plans for the East (*Generalplan Ost*) called for the establishment of German colonies in the Soviet Union to secure a German empire in Eastern Europe. Fleischhauer, *Das Dritte Reich und die Deutschen in der Sowjetunion*, 75. As Doris Bergen argues, the existence of ethnic German communities in Eastern Europe was a crucial justification for the Nazi regime to go to war—so much so that she contends that it would have even invented these settlements to make its argument. Bergen, “The Nazi Concept of ‘Volksdeutsche,’” 570.

⁴⁰ Fleischhauer, *Das Dritte Reich und die Deutschen in der Sowjetunion*, 63.

⁴¹ Valdis O. Lumans, “A Reassessment of *Volksdeutsche* and Jews in the Volhynia-Galacia-Narew Resettlement,” in *The Impact of Nazism: New Perspectives on the Third Reich and Its Legacy*, ed. Alan E. Steinweis and Daniel E. Rogers (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2003), 85.

The chief arm of Himmler's Volksdeutsche policy was the SS-run Ethnic German Liaison Office (*die Volksdeutsche Mittelstelle*), which was led, after 1937, by SS-Lieutenant General (*Obergruppenführer*) Werner Lorenz, a trusted associate whom Himmler had assigned to secure Hamburg in the midst of the 1934 Röhm purge.⁴² Although created in 1935 as a nominally independent Nazi party organization, the staff of the Ethnic German Liaison Office quickly joined the SS and, after the beginning of the war, its number of career SS-officers increased. After a brief two years of existence, in 1937 the Ethnic German Liaison Office assumed responsibility for all Volksdeutsche affairs, and the following year, Hitler endowed it with state authority.⁴³ Thus, by the beginning of the Second World War, ethnic German matters were the bailiwick of Himmler's SS.⁴⁴

Himmler was sorely disappointed by the largely urban Baltic Volksdeutschen that the Ethnic German Liaison Office had "called home to the Reich" during its resettlement campaign in 1939 because of their unsuitability as agricultural colonists in the East. Undaunted, the Reichsführer had great expectations for potential racial specimens from the predominately rural ethnic German communities of the Soviet Union.⁴⁵ On July 11, 1941, three weeks after the invasion of the Soviet Union, Himmler ordered the Ethnic

⁴² Lumans, *Himmler's Auxiliaries*, 43. As Lumans illustrates, by November 1944 Lorenz was listed as the fifteenth-ranking SS officer. Ibid., 49.

⁴³ Ibid., 64-66.

⁴⁴ Fleischhauer, *Das Dritte Reich und die Deutschen in der Sowjetunion*, 73.

⁴⁵ Imbued with the Nazis' bucolic fascination, Himmler was convinced that the ethnic Germans of the Soviet Union would meet the Nazis' romantic agrarian ideals. Lumans, "A Reassessment of *Volksdeutsche* and Jews," 85.

German Liaison Office to create a special unit to organize the country's ethnic Germans. The result was Bureau VII, which, unlike other departments of the Ethnic German Liaison Office, was directly accountable to Himmler. As one of the three command posts of Bureau VII, Special Command Russia (*Sonderkommando R[ußland]*) was responsible for enacting Nazi Germany's manifold plans for the Transnistria's Volksdeutschen. In contrast to previous German efforts to relocate ethnic Germans to the Greater German Reich, Himmler entrusted Special Command Russia with the task of establishing a Nazi racial utopia in the Transnistria.⁴⁶

In September 1941, Special Command Russia assumed direct and complete responsibility for the Transnistria's Volksdeutschen communities. Although Germany granted Romania control of the Transnistria in August 1941, German officials made no arrangements with their Romanian counterparts, who were chagrined at the presence of a cadre of arrogant and demanding SS officials.⁴⁷ Special Command Russia's status would not be resolved until the unit's commander, Horst Hoffmeyer, hammered out an agreement with Gheorghe Alexianu, the local Romanian governor, in Odessa during the second week of December 1941.⁴⁸ Despite the fact that Special Command Russia initially operated with no official authorization from Romanian officials, the unit began establishing an autonomous SS-administration within Romanian-occupied territory.⁴⁹

⁴⁶ Barch, B 162/2297/91-92.

⁴⁷ Ancel, *Transnistria, 1941-1942*, 300-1.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 306.

⁴⁹ Some authors term this arrangement a "state-within-a-state" in reference to the fact that Special Command Russia assumed many of the functions of a state. The term state, however, is deceptive in the

Commanded by Hoffmeyer's assistant Dr. Klaus Siebert from September 1941 until his promotion in March 1943, Special Command Russia established its Transnistrian headquarters in the ethnic German settlement of Landau, approximately fifty kilometers northwest of Nikolaev.⁵⁰ With a staff of twenty SS and fifty NSKK (National Socialist Motor Corps—*Nationalsozialistischer Kraftfahrkorps*) personnel, Siebert's unit organized its command post in the former Soviet government building.⁵¹ To replace the provisional ethnic German authorities, whom Einsatzgruppe D appointed in August, the following month Special Command Russia created thirty Regional Commands (*Bereichkommandos*) in occupied Soviet territory, eighteen of which were in the Transnistria.⁵² Over the coming weeks and months, these Regional Commands were to become the nuclei for all interaction with the Soviet Union's Volksdeutschen. In addition to a Regional Command in Odessa, Special Command Russia established Regional Commands in major ethnic German settlements like Alexanderfeld, Bischofsfeld, Groß-Liebental, Landau, Lichtenfeld, Janowka, Halbstadt, Helenental, Hoffnungsthal, Mannheim, Marienberg, Neudorf, Rastadt, Rosenfeld, Selz, and Worms (Figure 1).⁵³ Because Nazi officials frequently claimed jurisdiction over land that had belonged to ethnic Germans prior to the Bolshevik Revolution, Regional Commands typically

sense that the SS never controlled a consecutive territory, but rather small pockets of ethnic German settlements. Ibid., 301-2.

⁵⁰ Barch, B 162/2297/88-9, 92. Barch, B 162/2315/23.

⁵¹ Barch, B 162/2315/227.

⁵² Barch, B 162/2297/92. Fleischhauer, *Das Dritte Reich und die Deutschen in der Sowjetunion*, 109-10.

⁵³ Barch, B 162/2297/92. Barch, B 162/2315/24.

controlled a cluster of smaller surrounding ethnic German settlements as well as the

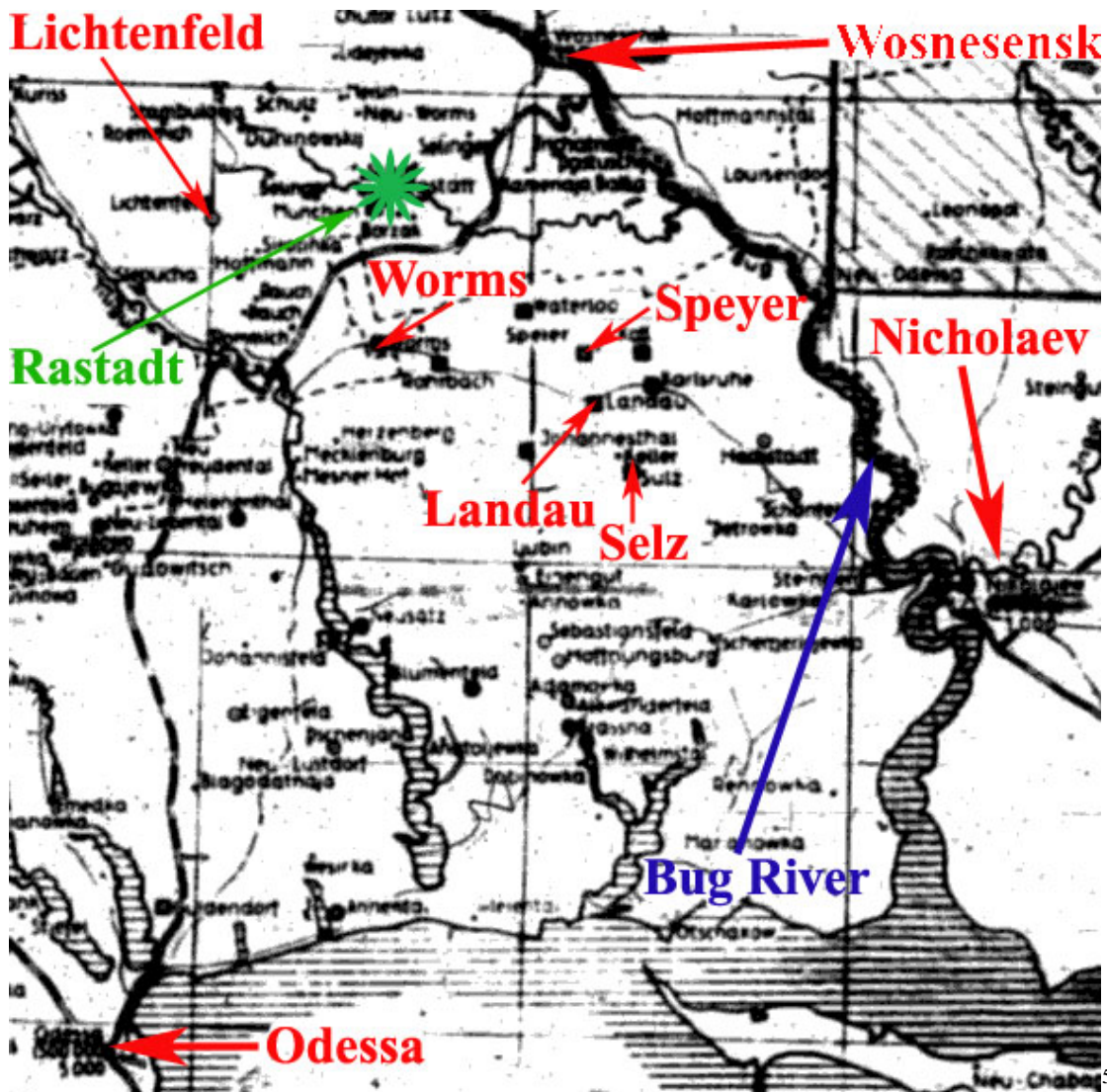


Figure 1. Ethnic German Settlements between Odessa and Nikolaev circa 1942.

adjacent farmland, thus creating pockets of German rule in Romanian-occupied territory.⁵⁵ Siebert quickly assigned at least two German officials to each Regional

⁵⁴ “Deutsche Kolonien (Vorkriegsstand),” T175/72/2589129. (Large script my additions.)

⁵⁵ Barch, B 162/2315/310. As Jean Ancel notes, after decades of Soviet rule, many of these “ethnic German” villages were no longer homogenous. German officials thus had to engineer some of these settlements by deporting Ukrainians and importing ethnic Germans from other parts of Ukraine. Ancel, *Transnistria, 1941-1942*, 301-2.

Command: an SS-officer with a typical rank of captain (*Hauptsturmführer*) to act as the Regional Commander (*Bereichskommandant*) and an enlisted SS or NSKK member as his assistant.⁵⁶ By mid-September 1941, Special Command Russia had effectively established its control over the Transnistria's ethnic German settlements.

The Final Solution in the Transnistria

The heat generated by the friction between Germany and Romania's genocidal plans kindled the crimes of the Transnistria's ethnic German auxiliary police. Since archival access began during the early 1990s, Romania's participation in the Holocaust has been the subject of much research.⁵⁷ While Romania's overall genocidal policies remain beyond the scope of the present study, it is important to note that Ion Antonescu's Romania was initially a willing, and, as the Holocaust in the Transnistria demonstrates, even a zealous participant in the destruction of European Jewry.

For Antonescu, the territory bordered by the Dniester and Bug rivers and the Black Sea was not merely a crucial territorial component of his historical fantasy of transforming Romania into greater Dacia, but it was also a "garbage dump" for Romania's unwanted ethnic and religious minorities, such as Jews.⁵⁸ In the early years of the war, Romania deported 160,000 Jews from Bessarabia, Bukovina, and Dorohoi to the Transnistria,

⁵⁶ A prime example of this pattern is the Regional Command in Helenental. *Barch*, B 162/2315/311.

⁵⁷ Radu Ioanid provides one of the best surveys of Romania's complicity in the Holocaust. Radu Ioanid, *The Holocaust in Romania: The Destruction of Jews and Gypsies under the Antonescu Regime, 1940-44*, trans. Marc J. Masurovsky (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 2000).

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 176-77.

under such terrible conditions that only 135,000 expellees reached their destination.⁵⁹

Furthermore, the Transnistria was the primary location of Romania's contribution to the Holocaust. Out of a total wartime Jewish population of approximately 285,000 in the Transnistria, which included indigenous and deported Jews, approximately 250,000 died during Romanian rule as a result of both outright murder as well as the grisly conditions imposed by the region's Romanian overlords.⁶⁰ Carried out with a rare intensity, Romania's independent genocidal project in the Transnistria dovetailed with the Nazi regime's Final Solution.

The crimes of the ethnic German auxiliary police during the winter of 1941-42 were a direct consequence of the Romanian regime's decision to clear Odessa of its remaining Jewish population in retaliation for its own military ineptness during Operation Barbarossa. Insistent that the Romanian army prove its metal against Soviet forces, Antonescu ordered the Romanian Third and Fourth Armies to attack Odessa without German assistance. The assault began on August 18, 1941, but it soon became bogged down and Romania was ignobly forced to seek German assistance, which arrived on September 24. Despite heavy casualties on both sides, the Soviet command did not evacuate by sea until October 16, thereby denying the Romanian army its quick, decisive victory.⁶¹ After two months of combat, the badly mauled Romanian army entered the city and pillaged the Transnistria's planned provincial capital. During the initial days of

⁵⁹ Ibid., 177.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Ancel, *Transnistria, 1941-1942*, 90.

the occupation, Romanian forces vented their frustration by murdering as many as 8,000 civilians, and targeting specifically the city's remaining 70,000 Jews, who had not fled with the retreating Soviet forces.⁶²

Romanian hostility toward the city's Jews dramatically increased after a bomb planted by the Soviets destroyed the Romanian General Staff headquarters, located in the former NKVD building, on October 22. In addition to killing more than fifty Romanian and German soldiers and officers, the bomb claimed the life of General Glogojanu, Odessa's new Romanian military commander. To add insult to injury, the Romanian military had received creditable intelligence reports indicating that the building was booby trapped prior to the explosion, and yet took no preventative action.⁶³ Based on fantastic claims that Odessa's Jews had triggered the bomb by a remote detonator, on Antonescu's orders the Romanian army rounded up many of the city's Jews and, over the course of the next three days, brutally murdered between 18,000 and 25,000 men, women, and children in the nearby suburb of Dalnic.⁶⁴

Despite the Romanian army's bloody rampage, in the wake of the Odessa debacle, the Antonescu regime was unable to deport the city's remaining Jews. Upset that Romania was trying to expel vast numbers of Jews into the occupied Soviet Union, Germany had secured an agreement with its Romanian allies that prevented immediate deportation of Jews across the Bug River, the border between Romania's Transnistria and Germany's

⁶² Ibid., 183, 120.

⁶³ Ibid., 186.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 188-203. Ioanid provides a slightly higher estimate of 25,000 Jewish victims at Dalnic. Ioanid, *The Holocaust in Romania*, 182.

Reichskommissariat Ukraine. According to section seven of the Tighina Treaty, signed on August 30, 1941, because “the deportation of Jews across the Bug is currently not possible ... they [the Jews] must therefore be placed in concentration camps and put to work until operations are complete and a deportation to the East is possible.”⁶⁵ While a subsequent agreement on November 11, 1941, between Alexianu and German authorities permitted local deportation of Jews to facilitate ghettoization, it held that Romanian authorities were not to deport Jews to German-occupied territory.⁶⁶ Thus, even at the peak of the Romanian army’s massacre of Jews in Odessa, the number of Jews in the Transnistria nevertheless grew dramatically because of the country’s ongoing deportation campaign, while treaty obligations prevented it from employing its favored anti-Jewish measure of deportation farther east.

This inherent tension came to a head during a December 16, 1941, cabinet meeting in Bucharest. Following a report on the situation of Odessa’s Jews that Alexianu had submitted to the cabinet, the Transnistria’s governor described the current state of Romanian Jewish policy in the city. Downplaying the typhus epidemic that raged among Odessa’s increasingly ghettoized Jews, Alexianu emphasized his own plan of putting able-bodied Jews to work and imprisoning the rest of the city’s Jews in the Soviet naval base near Ochakov.⁶⁷ Obviously frustrated by what he regarded as a lack of progress on the Jewish question, Antonescu turned to Alexianu and bellowed:

⁶⁵ “Vereinbarungen über die Sicherung, Verwaltung und Wirtschaftsauswertung der Gebiete zwischen Dnjestr und Bug (Transnistrien) und Bug und Dnjepr (Bug-Dnjepr-Gebiet).” T120/3132/E510834.

⁶⁶ “Verordnung Nr. 23; 11 November 1941,” T120/3132/E510822-25.

⁶⁷ Ancel, *Transnistria, 1941-1942*, 223-4.

The Germans want to bring all the Yids from Europe to Russia and settle them in specific areas, but it will take time until this is actually carried out. What will we do with [the Jews] in the meantime? Wait for a decision that affects us? Guarantee their safety? Pack them into the catacombs! Throw them into the Black Sea! But get them out of Odessa! As far as I'm concerned, a hundred can die, a thousand can die, they can all die!⁶⁸

At Antonescu's behest, immediately after the cabinet meeting Alexianu issued orders to the Romanian Third Army, stationed in Odessa, to begin deporting Jews.⁶⁹

Although there is no direct evidence that Alexianu or the Transnistria's other Romanian administrators knew that these deportations would prompt Special Command Russia to murder Odessa's Jews, their choice of deportation sites suggests that they courted this possibility. While local Romanian officials were to determine the specific deportation locations, Alexianu explicitly selected the northern Ochakov and the southern Berezovka districts as collection points for Odessa's Jewish deportees. On the one hand, these sites offered easy access to temporary bridges that the German military had erected across the Bug River, and would have facilitated an easy deportation into German-occupied territory at the conclusion of military operations against the Soviet Union.⁷⁰ On the other hand, Alexianu must have known that these deportations would have entailed marching thousands of typhus-carrying Jews directly through the Landau headquarters of Special Command Russia. From this location, Odessa's deported Jews not only threatened to contaminate the area's racial purity but posed a public health emergency in

⁶⁸ Quoted in *Ibid.*, 226.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 227.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 228-29.

the eyes of the area's SS administrators.⁷¹ By either deporting Odessa's Jews to the northern reaches of the Transnistria or prompting the area's ethnic Germans to murder the city's Jews for the Romanians, Alexianu accomplished his goal of annihilating Odessa's Jewish population.

It is important to note that the German fear of typhus that Alexianu successfully exploited in the winter of 1941-42 resulted from a medical reality created by the implementation of racist perceptions. According to German medical assumptions, Jews were often infested with body lice that carried the typhus-causing *Rickettsia* bacteria.⁷² Thus, for German doctors, the German medical term for typhus, *Fleckenfieber* (spotted fever), quickly became known as *Judenfieber* (Jew fever).⁷³ In order to combat the inherent public health hazard caused by typhus-infected Jews, German medical personnel in occupied Poland were among the first to advocate ghettoization as a means of quarantining the supposedly infectious Jews from the rest of the population.⁷⁴ Given the appalling overcrowding, lack of sanitation, and scarcity of food, typhus became "the

⁷¹ Ancel suggests that "the convoys transported to Berezovka and Veselinovo were not directed immediately to the German villages there; rather, these Jews were marched straight to the Bug with the aim of getting them to the other side, come what may." Ibid., 309. Although Ancel's hypothesis is plausible, it perhaps underestimates the degree to which Romanian authorities anticipated a German reaction. As indicated by numerous Romanian complaints about Special Command Russia's abuse of its occupation agreement, Romanian authorities were clearly aware of the SS's operations and the degree to which it would be threatened by the sudden appearance of thousands of contagious Jews.

⁷² Christopher R. Browning, "Genocide and Public Health: German Doctors and Polish Jews, 1939-1941," in *The Path to Genocide: Essays on Launching the Final Solution* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 148. Paul Julian Weindling, *Epidemics and Genocide in Eastern Europe, 1890-1945* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 273.

⁷³ Weindling, *Epidemics and Genocide in Eastern Europe*, 273.

⁷⁴ Browning, "Genocide and Public Health," 149.

ghetto disease par excellence.”⁷⁵ The result was that the Nazis created a “self-fulfilling prophecy” whereby supposedly diseased Jews were placed in a situation that was guaranteed to make them contract typhus.⁷⁶ Moreover, with limited typhus outbreaks in Breslau, Dresden, and Nuremberg during the winter of 1940-41, which German authorities attributed to forced laborers and prisoners of war from Eastern Europe, the connection between typhus and supposedly racially inferior peoples became self-reinforcing.⁷⁷ As German authorities increasingly ghettoized Jews under the guise of disease control measures, they created the situation in which their racist fears became medical reality.

In the context of Hitler’s “war of annihilation” in the East, anti-typhus measures became inexorably linked with mass murder. Even before the Wehrmacht crossed the Germano-Soviet frontier in the summer of 1941, the German Army’s medical staff was concerned with its personnel’s susceptibility to typhus.⁷⁸ In light of the fact that the German Army was to operate in the western Soviet Union, and precisely in the area of a 1921 typhus epidemic, the German military’s medical staff feared that the region’s inhabitants would have a higher natural immunity to typhus than German soldiers from the typhus-free Reich.⁷⁹ Although neither Hitler, nor the German General Staff initially

⁷⁵ Raul Hilberg, *The Destruction of the European Jews*, 3 vols., vol. 1 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), 272.

⁷⁶ Browning, “Genocide and Public Health,” 152.

⁷⁷ Weindling, *Epidemics and Genocide in Eastern Europe*, 271.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 284.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 286.

shared the fears of their medical officers, by the winter of 1941-42 typhus prevention became a German military priority.⁸⁰ Disease control thus evolved into a twofold policy. First, German personnel were to take great care in exterminating the bacteria-carrying lice that spread typhus. To combat typhus, the Reich Ministry for the Occupied Eastern Territories constructed a series of delousing stations throughout its domain, and the German Army issued strict guidelines for soldiers' personal hygiene.⁸¹ Second, the SS in particular had orders to murder suspected typhus carriers under the pretext of proactive public health.⁸² Regardless of the fact that high rates of typhus infections among Jews and Slavs was a product of German policy, these orders illustrate that the connection between genocide and public health was rapidly becoming the SS's standard operating procedure in the occupied Soviet Union by the winter of 1941-42.

Three points are crucial in understanding the role that the fear of a typhus epidemic played in the SS's specific decision to murder Odessa's Jews. First, it is almost certain that many of the city's Jews were infected with typhus. Both Romanian and German sources attest to a typhus epidemic in Odessa's ghettos. Second, typhus was a direct consequence of abysmal living conditions created by Romanian rule, and could have been prevented had the Romanian occupiers given any thought to the health of their Jewish captives. Given the heinous living conditions that Romanian authorities imposed on the city's Jews, it would have been remarkable had they not suffered from typhus.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ Ibid., 288.

⁸² Ibid.

Third, although typhus is not transmitted by person to person contact, German officials viewed the illness as a public health hazard to be treated like a highly contagious communicable disease. Thus the SS justified murder as a public health measure, in that its decision to kill Odessa's Jews was primed by Nazi policy to murder suspected non-German carriers of typhus. In short, both the reason for the typhus epidemic and the SS's murderous solution resulted from a particular anti-Semitic worldview.

It was this precise constellation of factors that Romanian authorities exploited when they began to deport Odessa's Jews. Beginning sporadically in mid-December 1941 and continuing virtually daily from January 12, 1942, to February 25, 1942, trains transported on average one to two thousand Jews from the Sortirovka station in Odessa to Berezovka, a nearby provincial center.⁸³ Prior to departure, representatives of the Romanian National Bank sent especially from Bucharest robbed the Jewish deportees of any remaining valuables.⁸⁴ During the extreme cold of the Soviet winter of 1941-42, when temperatures dipped to -35 degrees Fahrenheit, as many as 20 to 25 percent of deportees perished prior to arriving at their destinations. The Romanian gendarmerie that guarded the transports halfheartedly incinerated the corpses of those who succumbed to the cold in order to quell the spread of typhus.⁸⁵

⁸³ Ancel, *Transnistria, 1941-1942*, 253-63. Although Ancel documents regular train travel from early January onward, given that in their postwar interrogations members of the ethnic German auxiliary police recounted a pause in killing on Christmas (from December 24 to December 26), it appears likely that at least limited transports began prior to December 24, 1941. Angrick, *Besatzungspolitik und Massenmord*, 288. B 162/2313/39.

⁸⁴ Ancel, *Transnistria, 1941-1942*, 247.

⁸⁵ Ibid., 247-50.

As most of the documentation generated by Special Command Russia, limited though it likely was to begin with, does not appear to have survived the war, the specific chain of events that led to the participation of Special Command Russia and its ethnic German auxiliary police cannot be charted with complete certainty. Nevertheless, a likely path to the Final Solution can be constructed. In mid-December 1941, the SS staffs assigned to Worms, Lichtenfeld, and Rastadt reported to Special Command Russia's headquarters in Landau that Romanian authorities were driving thousands of Jews from Odessa into the Transnistria's Volksdeutsche settlements. Special Command Russia's Landau command center responded by ordering local SS commanders to keep the Jewish deportees out of the settlements, using force if necessary.⁸⁶ As local SS officers ordered their Volksdeutsche auxiliaries to begin murdering the Jews prior to Christmas 1941, this decision to kill likely preceded Hoffmeyer's authorization from Himmler sometime the following year. Based on postwar testimony, Angrick has recently argued that Hoffmeyer traveled to Berlin in January 1942 to consult with Himmler and to receive the Reichführer's authorization to begin murdering the recently deported Jews. Angrick further contends that before ordering his own command to begin killing the local Jews, Hoffmeyer contacted Otto Ohlendorf, the commander of Einsatzgruppe D, and requested that he return to the Transnistria in order to murder the Jewish deportees. Because Special Command Russia's settlements remained in Romanian-occupied territory, in which Einsatzgruppe D was not allowed to operate, Ohlendorf declined.⁸⁷ Hoffmeyer

⁸⁶ Angrick, *Besatzungspolitik und Massenmord*, 284-85.

⁸⁷ B 162/2297/110.

thus returned to Landau from Berlin and ordered his local SS commanders to begin murdering the Jews. Barring any conclusive evidence to the contrary, Angrick's reconstruction seems plausible.⁸⁸ However, regardless of whether Hoffmeyer received authorization from Himmler in January 1942 or later, it is clear that the latter only granted his endorsement after Special Command Russia began to murder the recently-arrived Jews in late December of the previous year.

Ironically, the very success of Romania's deportation policy appears to have both accelerated Special Command Russia's killing efforts in the short-term and spelled its own demise in the long run by provoking loud German diplomatic objections. During the second half of December 1941 and the first half of January 1942, the number of deportees from Odessa appears to have been relatively small. Beginning on January 12, 1942, however, Romanian occupation authorities dramatically ramped up deportations from Odessa, in which, with one exception, at least one and as many as three trains departed daily from Sortirovka station for the next six weeks. Given the harsh winter and the poor quality of coal that the Romanians had available to fire their locomotives, this rate of deportation is particularly impressive.⁸⁹ Nevertheless, just as Romanian deportations intensified during the first week of February 1942 (three transports departed on February

⁸⁸ Angrick, *Besatzungspolitik und Massenmord*, 286-87. Interestingly, contemporary documents do not support this conclusion. Himmler's agenda book, for example, shows no meetings between Hoffmeyer and Himmler between November 1, 1941 and February 1, 1942. Nevertheless, as indicated by their exclusive meetings on September 16, 1942 and October 21, 1942, Hoffmeyer and Himmler did have a pattern of individual meetings. Peter Witte, ed., *Der Dienstkalender Heinrich Himmlers, 1941/42* (Hamburg: Hans Christians Verlag, 1999), 251-334. Furthermore, in her postwar testimony, Hoffmeyer's widow stated that her husband had received orders directly from Himmler to begin the killing. B 162/2316/365-66. The prosecuting attorney nevertheless suggested that Hoffmeyer received the orders from Himmler while the latter was in residence at his Hegewald compound. B 162/2315/21.

⁸⁹ Ancel, *Transnistria, 1941-1942*, 247.

2, two on February 3, and two on February 4) German occupation officials on the other bank of the Bug River began to voice their objections.⁹⁰

On February 9, Generalkommissar Oppermann of Nikolaev called Erich Koch in Rowno by radio telephone and complained that “a large number of Jews, who are hardly being properly buried, are dying daily” on the opposite bank of the Bug.⁹¹ In Oppermann’s view, “this impossible situation will pose a great danger for the ethnic German villages in Transnistria and for the bordering area of the Reichskommissariat Ukraine.”⁹² Four days later, Oppermann again complained to Koch that the Romanians had deported 6,500 Jews to the west bank of the Bug immediately opposite his command post in Nikolaev, and that in nearby Wosnesensk the Romanians had delivered an additional 8,000 Jews “without sufficient security.”⁹³ Furthermore, Oppermann reported that, according to a Romanian border patrol officer, the Romanians were deporting up to an additional 60,000 Jews toward the Bug.⁹⁴ Moreover, individual groups of Jews had attempted to cross the border into the Reichskommissariat.⁹⁵ Oppermann also reiterated

⁹⁰ Ibid., 259-60.

⁹¹ “Funkspruch Gen. Komm. Nikolajew Oppermann an der Reichkomm. Ukr. Rowno, 9.2.1942,” T120/3132/E510845.

⁹² T120/3132/E510845.

⁹³ “Funkspruch Gen. Komm. Nikolajew Oppermann an der Reichkomm. Ukr. Rowno, 12.2.1942,” T120/3132/E510844.

⁹⁴ T120/3132/E510844.

⁹⁵ T120/3132/E510844.

that unless the deportations stopped, typhus would be a serious threat both to the German military as well as to the Transnistria's ethnic German settlements.⁹⁶ Acknowledging that their Romanian allies were "practically deporting" Jews in violation of the Tighina Treaty, Koch ordered Oppermann to keep a fifty kilometer swath of the Bug River's west bank clear.⁹⁷ Koch was apparently so concerned about the public health menace that these Jews posed to his bailiwick that he ordered his subordinate to operate in territory that, according to the Tighina Treaty, fell inside of the Romanian occupation zone.

While Koch ordered his field officers to take stopgap measures to prevent the deportation of Jews from the Romanian-occupied Transnistria to German-occupied Ukraine, his office passed these concerns on to the Interior Ministry and the Reich Ministry for the Occupied Eastern Territories, which in turn asked the Foreign Office to intervene with Bucharest.⁹⁸ Although the Foreign Office quickly forwarded these complaints up the chain of command, Foreign Minister Joachim von Ribbentrop concluded on February 13 "that the imprecise claims of a local commander are not sufficient cause for diplomatic intervention."⁹⁹ Apparently reluctant to risk alienating a close ally, the Foreign Office was initially unwilling to broach this topic with its Romanian counterpart.

⁹⁶ T120/3132/E510844.

⁹⁷ "Koch an Generalkommissar Oppermann / Fernschreiben, Rowno, 20. Februar 1942," T120/3132/E510838.

⁹⁸ Although it is unclear when Koch's office contacted the Foreign Office, given that Unterstaatssekretär Martin Luther forwarded a memo to Foreign Minister Joachim von Ribbentrop on February 11, 1942, the Foreign Office must have received these complaints almost immediately. "Vortragsnotiz," T120/3132/E510849.

⁹⁹ "Büro RAM. / 13.2.42," T120/3132/E510850.

Nevertheless, after continued complaints from the Ministry for the Occupied Eastern Territories, which included copies of the written complaints of local German officials, the Foreign Office eventually raised the issue with the Romanian government in late March 1942.¹⁰⁰ According to German ambassador Manfred von Killinger's report to the Foreign Office on March 26, 1942, he broached the issue with Mihai Antonescu, the vice president of the Council of Ministers. The latter assured von Killinger that although he would seek a mutually convenient solution to the problem, because "he was not informed about the details," he would first have to consult his subordinates.¹⁰¹ Given that Mihai Antonescu was a member of the Council of Ministers and, as indicated by his extensive postwar testimony, intimately familiar with Romania's Jewish deportations, it appears that his excuses to von Killinger were merely an effort to stall German requests while Alexianu completed the rest of the Odessa expulsions.¹⁰² Although the German Foreign Office pursued the issue at least through early June 1942, with the exception of continued deportations in late March and early April, the Romanians had removed most of Odessa's remaining Jewish population by late February.¹⁰³

Oppermann's specific complaints about the public health implications of Romania's Jewish deportations to the Bug cut to the very heart of why German officials were so

¹⁰⁰ Leibbrandt forwarded the appropriate materials to the Foreign Office on February 19, 1942. "Liebbrandt / an das Auswärtiges Amt / 19. Februar 42," T120/3132/E510847.

¹⁰¹ "Verschiebung von rumänischen Juden in die besetzten Ostgebiete," T120/3132/E510804.

¹⁰² Ancel highlights Mihai Antonescu's familiarity with Romanian deportation policy in his postwar statements. Ancel, *Transnistria, 1941-1942*, 87-8.

¹⁰³ "Der Chef der Sicherheitspolizei und des SD / an das Auswärtiges Amt, / z.Hd. von Herrn Konsultssekretär Engelke / 8 Juni 1942," T120/3132/E510795.

alarmed, and why, until the deportations could be stopped diplomatically, Special Command Russia murdered these newly-arrived Jews with such alacrity. While by early 1942 it was certainly the Nazi regime's intention to murder every last Jew whom it could capture, including those in Romanian-occupied Transnistria, German officials had no plans to kill this cohort of Jews while military operations were still underway. In fact, as indicated by the Tighina Treaty the previous year, it was the Nazi regime's express policy *not* to deport the Transnistria's Jews across the Bug for the foreseeable future. By driving large numbers of Jews, whom German officials correctly suspected of carrying typhus, through Volksdeutsche settlements and toward the German occupation zone, and by haphazardly disposing of their victims' corpses, Romanian Jewish policy prompted local Nazi officials to murder. So long as the number of deportees remained relatively small, as they did during the first month of deportations, the SS and its ethnic German auxiliaries killed approaching Romanian-guarded Jewish columns without provoking the ire of German administrators across the Bug River. When, however, Romanian officials dramatically increased the number of deportations and Jewish deportees began approaching the border between the two territories, German officials in the Reichskommissariat Ukraine vociferously objected and demanded a halt to further Jewish transports. By the time that the German Foreign Office was willing to bring sufficient diplomatic leverage to bear on Romania, Alexianu and his henchmen had successfully solved Odessa's "Jewish problem" by handing it over to Special Command Russia.

The Crimes of the Transnistria's Ethnic German Auxiliary Police

In order to understand how Special Command Russia perpetrated its killings, which amounted to more than 35,000 murders during the winter of 1941-42, it is first important to tease out the specific organizational structure of the auxiliary police units.¹⁰⁴ Shortly after arriving in the Transnistria in early September 1941, Special Command Russia expanded the militia units that it had inherited from Einsatzgruppe D into an auxiliary police force.¹⁰⁵ After establishing their Regional Commands, Regional Commanders instituted compulsory auxiliary police service for all ethnic German males seventeen to thirty-five years of age.¹⁰⁶ Oftentimes local Regional Commanders announced the formation of the auxiliary police units in public assemblies. In the ethnic German settlement of Neudorf, for example, the local SS commander called a meeting of all Volksdeutschen fit for military service and announced the formation of a police force to guard against partisans and thieves.¹⁰⁷ In a number of instances, SS officers and local ethnic German commanders visited reluctant Volksdeutsche at home, and apparently did

¹⁰⁴ The existing documentation provides only enough information for a rough estimate of the number of Special Command Russia's Jewish victims. According to the marginalia of a May 12, 1942, letter from the German Foreign Office to the Reich Ministry for the Occupied Eastern Territories, the ethnic German auxiliary police murdered at least 28,000 Jews. "Rademacher / Abschiebung von rumänischen Juden am Bug / 12. Mai 1942," T120/3132/E510806. By contrast, postwar Soviet estimates pegged the number of Jewish victims at the likely inflated figure of 54,000. Barch B 162/2313/39. Ancel estimates that between January and March 1942 the ethnic German auxiliary police murdered approximately 35,000 Jews from Odessa. Although Ancel's figures do not include the smaller number of murders that local ethnic Germans perpetrated in December 1941, his figures account for most of the winter's killings. Ancel, *Transnistria, 1941-1942*, 292.

¹⁰⁵ Barch, B 162/2315/25.

¹⁰⁶ Barch, B 162/2322/40.

¹⁰⁷ Barch, B 162/2313/14-15.

not permit any ethnic German men to excuse themselves from service.¹⁰⁸ As one Volksdeutscher pithily observed to Soviet investigators, “no one asked for our consent.”¹⁰⁹ Notwithstanding the personal and peer pressure that the area’s Regional Commanders brought to bear on the region’s ethnic Germans, there is no evidence that the Transnistria’s Volksdeutschen initially knew that their SS superiors would soon ask them to murder. In fact, the initial formation of the auxiliary police was reminiscent of the militias that Germany established in Ukraine during the First World War. Given that Special Command Russia created these police units months prior to the beginning of Romanian deportations, it is possible that the area’s SS commanders were unaware that their ethnic German subordinates would play a prominent role in the Final Solution. Nevertheless, by the late fall of 1941, Special Command Russia instituted a policy that dramatically increased the number of auxiliary policemen under its command.

As a result of these vigorous recruiting efforts, the size of the Volksdeutsche auxiliary police ballooned. In Speyer, for example, the fifteen-man militia established by Einsatzgruppe D increased to a force of fifty to one hundred ethnic German men between September 1941 and early 1942.¹¹⁰ Although this increase in the Transnistria was not unique, by the height of the occupation 7,000 of Ukraine’s nearly 13,000 ethnic German auxiliary policemen were in the region.¹¹¹ Out of an adult male population of

¹⁰⁸ *Barch*, B 162/2313/18, 30.

¹⁰⁹ *Barch*, B 162/2313/10.

¹¹⁰ *Barch*, B 162/2315/248.

¹¹¹ “Selbstschutz.” T175/72/2589180.

approximately 33,000, more than one out of five of the Transnistria's ethnic German men served in the region's auxiliary police—a statistic that does not include ethnic Germans serving in either German or Soviet armed forces. Moreover, of the twenty-seven auxiliary police training schools in Ukraine, Special Command Russia established sixteen of them in the Transnistria. To be sure, the Transnistria's distance from the front can explain in part why a region with a third of Ukraine's ethnic German population had over half of all ethnic German auxiliary policemen and nearly two-thirds of all training institutions.¹¹² Nevertheless, the disproportionate number of ethnic German policemen in the Transnistria also suggests that after Romanian deportations commenced in the winter of 1941-42, Special Command Russia expanded its ethnic German police force in response to its new genocidal mission.

Because the Transnistria's ethnic Germans were largely farmers, Regional Commanders divided their forces into active and reserve units to accommodate the region's agricultural cycle.¹¹³ Active duty units, which comprised only a fraction of the total force, served in a full-time capacity and received wildly varying amounts of training—ranging from a few weeks to a few months—at established police academies located in larger ethnic German settlements like Landau, Worms, Rastadt, and Adolfstal.¹¹⁴ For example, one former member of the active auxiliary police allegedly trained for two months at one of the two training schools in Nikolaev. Although only

¹¹² T175/72/2589157.

¹¹³ *Barch*, B 162/2315/26-27.

¹¹⁴ *Barch*, B 162/2315/26.

anecdotal evidence is available, it appears that members of the active auxiliary police units were younger than their reserve counterparts.¹¹⁵ In Worms, for example, one witness confirmed that the members of the local active unit were between seventeen and twenty-one years of age.¹¹⁶ According to Soviet trial records, the eleven defendants who were former members of the auxiliary police in Worms were on average born in 1921, making them all roughly twenty years old at the times of their alleged crimes.¹¹⁷ In addition, some scholars argue that younger ethnic Germans were more ideologically pro-Nazi than their elders.¹¹⁸ Thus, the active duty auxiliary policemen appear to have been young ethnic Germans who, unlike their older colleagues, could train for lengthy periods of time away from their homes and were possibly more committed National Socialists.

Reserve units of older ethnic German men, in which the majority of auxiliary policemen served, often had only a few days of local training typically supervised by either German members of the Regional Command or the unit's ethnic German leader. The reserve units typically assembled on Sundays—the only day free from agricultural responsibilities—to drill at the local auxiliary police headquarters. Like their active duty counterparts, reserve unit members took an oath both to serve Germany and to obey

¹¹⁵ Barch, B 162/2313/165-66. The relative youth of the Transnistria's ethnic German active auxiliary police units parallels that of the largely Slavic local police (*Schutzmannschaft*) in Belarus and Ukraine. Dean, *Collaboration in the Holocaust*, 73.

¹¹⁶ Barch, B 162/2313/175.

¹¹⁷ Barch, B 162/2313/167.

¹¹⁸ Berkhoff, *Harvest of Despair*, 222.

Hitler unquestioningly.¹¹⁹ As reserve units comprised more than three quarters of all auxiliary policemen in some areas, large missions, such as mass shootings that the ethnic German auxiliary police perpetrated in the winter of 1941-42, typically required joint operations of both active and reserve units.

In the case of one massacre in January 1942 outside of Worms, former auxiliary policemen recalled how German and Romanian authorities led the Jewish victims into the area on a particular Sunday evening.¹²⁰ The timing of this massacre raises the interesting possibility that the auxiliary police often perpetrated its crimes on Sundays when sufficient numbers of reserve policemen were already assembled for training. Moreover, from Special Command Russia's perspective, it was fortuitous that the Romanian deportations took place during the winter of 1941-42. Had these expulsions occurred during other seasons, these Volksdeutsche perpetrators would have been occupied on their farms, and thus unavailable for such duty. According to 1942 estimates by German police authorities in Kiev, of the Transnistria's estimated 5,000 ethnic German auxiliary policemen, only 250 could serve during the summer months.¹²¹ Thus, anecdotal evidence raises the possibility that both the composition of the Transnistria's ethnic German auxiliary police and the specific timing of its crimes were a product of the agricultural cycle of the region's ethnic German communities.

¹¹⁹ *Barch*, B 162/2315/26-8.

¹²⁰ *Barch*, B 162/2313/130.

¹²¹ *Barch*, B 162/2315/27.

In addition to the age differences between the members of the active and reserve auxiliary police units, the majority of ethnic German auxiliary policemen had little education. Many policemen had attended elementary school, but few if any had more than a basic education. A significant proportion of this cohort was likewise illiterate. For example, when the NKVD interrogated the surviving members of the Rastadt active auxiliary police unit more than a decade after the war, the court noted that nearly a quarter of the defendants were either completely or functionally illiterate.¹²² Like members of the largely Slavic local police in Belarus and other parts of Ukraine, it appears that most of the Transnistria's ethnic German policemen were peasants with little formal education.¹²³

Similar to other German-organized Eastern European assistants, the Transnistria's ethnic German auxiliary police was poorly equipped.¹²⁴ Their weapons, almost exclusively small arms, were mostly obsolete captured Soviet firearms of various makes and models. Both active and reserve units typically drew their weapons and ammunition from the local auxiliary police command post prior to their assignments. Special Command Russia established the typical command post in a preexisting former Soviet government building or other suitable structure. In one case, the auxiliary police established its command center in the home of one policeman's father. In addition to housing the unit's armory and administrative offices, the local command post also served

¹²² *Barch*, B 162/2313/33-35.

¹²³ Dean, *Collaboration in the Holocaust*, 74.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, 68.

as barracks for the local active duty auxiliary policemen. Uniforms for both the active and reserve auxiliary policemen were initially nonexistent. Special Command Russia thus issued ethnic German auxiliary policemen armbands marked with a swastika that they wore on their left arms while on duty. Although the Regional Commander typically had an automobile at his disposal, most ethnic German auxiliary policemen traveled by foot or on horseback. In contrast to the well-equipped, motorized Einsatzgruppen that rolled across the Soviet Union in a murderous campaign, the Transnistria's ethnic German auxiliary police was generally poorly trained and badly supplied.¹²⁵

The participation of the Transnistria's ethnic German auxiliary police in the Holocaust had less to do with their own characteristics than with the Nazi regime's need for killing personnel in the Transnistria. One of the paradoxes that the Nazi leadership faced as it sought to implement its genocidal policies was that the Holocaust could only take place under the cloak of global war. While the Second World War provided the opportunity for the "Final Solution," it nearly robbed Himmler and his henchmen of the personnel needed to see their bloody plans to fruition. As Browning aptly recognizes, Nazi planners did not use members of the Order Police (*Ordnungspolizei*) reserves as killers because of their ideological purity or their political reliability. Rather, they used these middle-aged reserve policemen because the Order Police contained some of the only available personnel.¹²⁶ As a sign of their desperation, German officials even opened special training camps that included German-language education for non-Germanophone recruits,

¹²⁵ Barch, B 162/2315/27, 177. Barch, B 162/2313/132, 140, 153, 177.

¹²⁶ Browning, *Ordinary Men*, 165.

and culled passing Soviet POW columns for Germanic-looking Red Army soldiers.¹²⁷ In light of this personnel crisis, the Transnistria's ethnic Germans were a crucial manpower pool from which the Holocaust's architects could draw at precisely the time at which Special Command Russia needed killers.

Because the Transnistria's ethnic Germans were not German citizens, they were ineligible for German military service.¹²⁸ Moreover, by virtue of Special Command Russia's agreements with Romanian occupation authorities and Himmler's preeminent position in ethnic German affairs, there were no international or domestic obstacles to using the Transnistria's ethnic German auxiliary police as killing personnel. Furthermore, because of the alarmingly small number of ethnic German men in the Transnistria, Himmler refused to deploy the area's ethnic Germans outside of their localities for fear that doing so would deplete the communities' reproductive capabilities.¹²⁹ In fact, it was not until after the German military setbacks at Stalingrad that, in February 1943, Himmler stationed the region's auxiliary police units outside of the Transnistria.¹³⁰ During late 1941 and 1942, the Transnistria's ethnic Germans remained one of the only sources of manpower that had yet to be mobilized for the war effort.

¹²⁷ Mark P. Gingerich, "Waffen SS Recruitment in the "Germanic Lands," 1940-1941," *The Historian* 59, no. 4 (1997): 827. Fleischhauer, *Das Dritte Reich und die Deutschen in der Sowjetunion*, 88.

¹²⁸ Lumans, *Himmler's Auxiliaries*, 39.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, 246-47.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*

Although further research into the crimes of the Transnistria's ethnic Germans is necessary, the example of the ethnic German auxiliary police unit that operated around Rastadt during the winter of 1941-42 illustrates a number of important features to the killings. The German Army occupied Rastadt, an ethnic German settlement of between two and three thousand residents, on August 11, 1941.¹³¹ The following month, SS-Captain (*Hauptsturmführer*) Rudolf Hartung and two NSKK sergeants (*Sturmführer*) established Regional Command XIV in the town's parsonage and founded an ethnic German auxiliary police force.¹³² As mentioned above, Hartung's Rastadt unit was one of the first to report the Romanian deportations to Hoffmeyer in Landau and also one of the first to begin killing.

While it is difficult to reconstruct the specific circumstances surrounding each of the ten to twenty massacres that Hartung's auxiliary police unit perpetrated, it is possible to establish a typical series of events.¹³³ From the train station in Berezovka, the Romanian gendarmerie forced columns of emaciated and diseased Jews, most of whom were old men, women, and children, to march in circles for days in order to increase the death toll before arriving at detention camps near the region's ethnic German villages.¹³⁴ In the dead of winter and without any food or water, these conditions were deathtraps explicitly designed to kill as many Jews as possible. While their victims suffered, Hartung

¹³¹ Barch B 162/2315/59.

¹³² Barch B 162/2315/59. Barch B 162/2313/124-5. Angrick, *Besatzungspolitik und Massenmord*, 285.

¹³³ Barch B 162/2315/67.

¹³⁴ Ancel, *Transnistria, 1941-1942*, 253.

assembled his command's policemen at the local police station either on the day of the massacre or a few days prior to the killing.¹³⁵ Given that the typical execution squad of fifty policemen required both the active as well as the reserve unit of the auxiliary police, and given the probable lack of telephone communications, the Regional Commander frequently had to wait anywhere from a few hours to a few days to assemble the necessary personnel.¹³⁶ After issuing the auxiliary policemen rifles and ammunition from the armory, Hartung or his German subordinates led the policemen out of town to the execution site. Upon reaching the countryside immediately outside of town, Hartung, who reportedly spoke fluent Russian, ordered the victims to strip to their underwear and to hand over all of their valuables.¹³⁷ Having collected their victims' belongings, the policemen shot the Jews and incinerated their bodies.

As one ethnic German auxiliary policeman detailed this process during a 1957 KGB interrogation:

In the second half of January 1942, I was ordered by the village commander, along with other individuals—namely local residents of German nationality—to report to the barracks. We were told that, along with policemen from the main unit of the militia, we were not to allow any unknown persons into our village and that we would need to kill the Jews who were to be brought to our village. A few days after the start of our stay in the barracks, two assistants from the commandant's office . . . (perhaps it was only one of the two) arrived, handed us 10 to 15 cartridges [a piece] and ordered those of us in the barracks out and onto the street to the edge of the forest in the direction of Berezovka. . . . As we arrived at the edge of the forest we saw a column of slow moving Jews, mainly women with a few old men and children. The aforementioned people were going parallel to the edge of the forest. . . . On order of the commander, these

¹³⁵ B 162/2313/39.

¹³⁶ B 162/2315/90-91.

¹³⁷ B 162/2315/70-71.

policemen and us—those who had come from the barracks—opened fire on the Jews. By early evening, everything with these approximately 200 to 300 Jews was finished and we headed home. . . . I heard that the corpses of the Jews who were shot were piled up and burned. The village elder [Dorfstarosta] . . . had the local leading residents gather the corpses and set them alight.¹³⁸

While all of the murders perpetrated by Rastadt's ethnic German auxiliary police followed this basic pattern, preliminary evidence indicates that both the scale and the efficiency of the killings increased over the course of the winter. Whereas in December 1941 the Rastadt unit murdered smaller groups of thirty to fifty Jews per massacre, by January 1942, the number of Jews murdered in each massacre increased as much as five fold.¹³⁹ Although this jump coincides with larger Romanian deportations in early 1942, it also indicates that the same number of men became more efficient killers both in terms of killing technique and body disposal. Despite the fact that in earlier massacres ethnic German policemen testified that they shot randomly into a large group of Jews, in subsequent mass murders the policemen killed small groups of Jews using a *Genickschuß*, a single shot to the base of the skull delivered at a distance of three to four meters.¹⁴⁰ As the Einsatzgruppen had learned earlier, this method of killing was both more accurate and consumed less ammunition.

Rastadt's auxiliary policemen also made similar advancements in terms of body disposal. Contrary to early massacres in which the auxiliary policemen or their Russian helpers had to transport their victims to pits for cremation, the perpetrators later simply

¹³⁸ B 162/2315/75-76.

¹³⁹ B 162/2313/40, 90.

¹⁴⁰ B 162 2315 69-70. B 162/2313/22, 90.

shot their victims at the edge of preexisting pits and allowed the corpses to fall in before dousing them with gasoline and setting them on fire.¹⁴¹ Prior to the war, the area's Volksdeutschen had used a "cadaver dump," which was located on the edge of a hill approximately three kilometers from Rastadt, to dispose of the corpses of game and farm animals. Approximately five to six meters wide and roughly six to eight meters deep, this preexisting trench appears to have been a choice dual execution and incineration location for Rastadt's Volksdeutsche police unit.¹⁴² Alternatively, Special Command Russia also employed limekilns, which were ubiquitous in the Transnistria as a means of producing quicklime, as a way to cremate their victims efficiently.¹⁴³ Notwithstanding the increased speed with which Special Command Russia could murder its victims, this grisly innovation had one notable disadvantage. As the Rastadt auxiliary police cremated its victims' bodies, the stench of burning flesh and hair wafted into the neighboring ethnic German settlement and ensured that no one in the surrounding communities was ignorant of the massacres.¹⁴⁴

In Rastadt, as in other villages, one important motivation for both the SS commanders and for the Volksdeutsche auxiliary policemen was simple robbery. Although the Volksdeutschen were the recipients of much of the booty of these killings, it appears that

¹⁴¹ B 162/2315/75-76. B 162/2315/61.

¹⁴² B 162/2315/61.

¹⁴³ B 162/2315/61, 64. Based on Ukrainian sources, Ancel argues that cremations at limekilns developed a carnival-like atmosphere among local ethnic Germans. Ancel, *Transnistria, 1941-1942*, 320-22.

¹⁴⁴ B 162/2315/180-81.

the most valuable items found their way into the pockets of Special Command Russia's German officers. According to postwar testimony, Hartung kept the equivalent of three to four wheelbarrows full of bracelets and pocket watches in his command post office.¹⁴⁵ Not to be outdone by their German superiors, Volksdeutsche auxiliary policemen sometimes took the initiative and appropriated the spoils of murder for themselves. For example, in December 1941, an auxiliary policeman from Rastadt arrested a Jew who attempted to enter an ethnic German settlement to barter his boots away for some food. Rather than to trade for the boots, the Volksdeutscher led the Jew outside of town and shot him in order to steal his footwear.¹⁴⁶ In addition, local Russians, who appear to have assisted voluntarily the auxiliary police in incinerating the corpses, were likely motivated by the potential for material gain.¹⁴⁷ Furthermore, it appears that the most common type of booty for the Transnistria's ethnic Germans was clothing taken from Jewish victims prior to murder.¹⁴⁸ Given that German authorities predicated these killings in large measure as a way to contain typhus, which is spread by lice that infest garments, these murders ironically increased the risk of infection for the Transnistria's Volksdeutschen. The greed of Special Command Russia and its ethnic German accomplices not only negated the original justification for their crimes, but also produced precisely what Nazi officials claimed to be trying to prevent.

¹⁴⁵ B 162/2315/65-66.

¹⁴⁶ B 162/2313/41.

¹⁴⁷ B 162/2315/177, 180.

¹⁴⁸ B 162/2315/65.

Although the crimes of the Rastadt auxiliary police highlight the basic pattern that all of Special Command Russia's massacres followed, two additional features must be noted. First, although these types of massacres occurred throughout the Transnistria's ethnic German settlements, they appear to have been concentrated in certain areas. For example, based on West German interrogations, the area around the Volksdeutsche village of Mannheim was the scene of multiple massacres, whereas the area around Neudorf was relatively quiet.¹⁴⁹ While it is possible that witnesses and defendants successfully deceived postwar investigators, it appears equally likely that these murders occurred around the specific locations to which the Romanian gendarmerie drove its Jewish captives. Second, some Regional Commanders seem to have regarded ethnic German participation in these murders as a crucial initiation ritual. After a massacre to the west of Lichtenfeld in February 1942, for example, the SS-man and the local ethnic German commander overseeing the killing ordered the area's Volksdeutsche policemen to parade past the corpse-filled ditch to sanctify it as a "swearing-in location." As this instance illustrates, some local SS commanders placed great emphasis on ethnic German participation in these murders, and declared it to be a matter of "honor."¹⁵⁰

While Special Command Russia's ethnic German auxiliary police shared many similarities with other perpetrator cohorts, it is important to note that, unlike the itinerant killers of the Einsatzgruppen or the Order Police, Special Command Russia's auxiliary policemen had to fit their crimes within their everyday frame of reference. This process

¹⁴⁹ B 162/2315/263, 274.

¹⁵⁰ B 162/2315/222-23.

occurred on two levels. First, unlike many German perpetrators who committed their crimes in distant Eastern Europe hundreds of miles from their homes, the Transnistria's Volksdeutschen perpetrators murdered their victims directly outside of their villages, and well within their preexisting geographic and linguistic frameworks. Second, in contrast to German perpetrators who murdered their victims at chronologically-discrete times, namely while stationed with their units, Special Command Russia's auxiliary policemen had to incorporate their crimes into their everyday existence. As part-time killers, the Transnistria's ethnic German murderers were only away from their homes for at most a few days and oftentimes returned to their families immediately after murdering. Rather than murder as a unique *métier* or as "work" distinctly separate from personal life that some scholars highlight, these auxiliary policemen had to integrate absolutely grisly crimes into the cycle of their normal lives in a way that most German perpetrators did not.¹⁵¹ Therefore, while the crimes of the Volksdeutsche auxiliary police were ostensibly similar to those of German perpetrators, both their geographical and their personal proximity to their killing actions distinguish them from other perpetrator cohorts.

¹⁵¹ Looking primarily at Einsatzgruppen and the Order Police, Welzer argues that one of the ways in which perpetrators could create a different frame of reference was through the professionalization of their crimes. Welzer, *Täter*, 89-90.

CHAPTER III

CREATING PERPETRATORS: SS POLICY AND THE TRANSNISTRIA'S ETHNIC GERMANS

Creating the New Nazi Order

To understand the unique context created by SS policy in the Transnistria, it is necessary to trace the contours of German rule from the very arrival of German forces. In the late summer of 1941 the rapid advance of German and Romanian forces, as well as the chaotic retreat of the Red Army, yielded huge territorial gains for the invading forces. Between early and mid-August 1941, forward elements of the German Army occupied the Volksdeutschen communities northeast of Odessa.¹⁵² During the Romanian-German advance, approximately one-third of all ethnic German villages were destroyed in the course of battle.¹⁵³ After routing Soviet forces, the German military's immediate concern was to protect the area's ethnic Germans from remaining communists and the retreating Red Army.¹⁵⁴ By the order of the German Eleventh Army's commander, Colonel General von Schobert, occupying forces were to treat all crimes against the area's ethnic Germans as capital offences, and every Volksdeutsche house received a placard

¹⁵² Buchsweiler, *Volksdeutsche in der Ukraine*, 306.

¹⁵³ Ibid., 297.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid., 308-9.

indicating its inhabitants' ethnicity.¹⁵⁵ Within days of the initial occupation, the German Army stationed a company of the elite "Brandenburg" Regiment, which had recently rotated out of frontline duty due to casualties, to provide security for the area's ethnic Germans.¹⁵⁶ In order to guard against potential plundering by Romanian units, the German Army also established nascent ethnic German self-defense units.¹⁵⁷ While the reports that the German military submitted to Berlin concerning the political orientation of the area's ethnic Germans varied, they almost unanimously decried the poor physical condition of the area's Volksdeutschen.¹⁵⁸

Although the German military controlled the Kutschurgan enclave for only a relatively short period of time, it initiated the region's Nazification by simultaneously providing material aid to the area's politically and racially desirable majority as well as assisting in the murder of a suspect minority. For example, the Wehrmacht's medical staff immediately began treating Volksdeutsche patients and distributing victuals to needy ethnic Germans.¹⁵⁹ In Kandel, this concern for Volksdeutsche health and welfare even prompted army physicians to instruct nursing ethnic German mothers in modern feeding

¹⁵⁵ Ibid., 297.

¹⁵⁶ As Buschweiler notes, the "Brandenburg" Regiment was comprised largely of Soviet ethnic German émigrés who often spoke fluent Russian. Ibid., 300-5.

¹⁵⁷ Angrick, *Besatzungspolitik und Massenmord*, 260.

¹⁵⁸ Buchsweiler, *Volksdeutsche in der Ukraine*, 312-16. Reports from the 73rd Infantry Division, for example, suggested that the area's Volksdeutsche were in poor physical condition. Angrick, *Besatzungspolitik und Massenmord*, 256.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid., 260.

techniques.¹⁶⁰ Likewise, the Brandenburg regiment rewrote the local ethnic German school curriculum and sent away for appropriate teaching materials from Württemberg-Hohenzollern, which arrived at the beginning of October 1941.¹⁶¹ As would become a pattern throughout the duration of the German occupation, these material benefits came with an explicit political agenda. On August 24 in the town of Baden, the local Volksdeutschen opened a town meeting with the stiff-armed Nazi salute and declaration of “Heil Hitler” a mere eleven days after the arrival of German forces.¹⁶² For a population in which many had never seen Hitler’s picture, this startling change in visible political behavior is all the more impressive.¹⁶³

Within a matter of days of the initial German occupation, the advanced guard of Einsatzgruppe D arrived to further the bloody process of converting disparate ethnic German settlements into colonial outposts of Nazi Germany’s planned empire in the East.¹⁶⁴ In August and September 1941, for example, Einsatzkommando 12 of Einsatzgruppe D began classifying the local population and murdering “undesirable”

¹⁶⁰ Ibid., 264.

¹⁶¹ Ibid.

¹⁶² Buchsweiler, *Volksdeutsche in der Ukraine*, 309.

¹⁶³ As Andrew Stuart Bergerson notes, the introduction of the “Heil Hitler” in Nazi Germany transformed a greeting from an act that established social normalcy to an aggressive and accusatory act that forced individuals to make immediate and visible affirmation of their political loyalties. Andrew Stuart Bergerson, *Ordinary Germans in Extraordinary Times: The Nazi Revolution in Hildesheim* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004), 1-44.

¹⁶⁴ According to Otto Ohldendorf’s estimates, Einsatzgruppe D murdered up to 100,000 victims in the Transnistria during its 1941 sweep. Ancel, *Transnistria, 1941-1942*, 50.

elements in Speyer, a Volksdeutsche settlement approximately fifty kilometers northwest of Nikolaev.¹⁶⁵ As with the vast majority of Einsatzgruppe missions, the eight SS-officers in Speyer focused on annihilating the region's Jews.¹⁶⁶ In order to collect the hundreds of Jews in the surrounding area who had fled the initial German advance, Einsatzkommando 12 used hastily organized ethnic German auxiliary forces to transport its victims.¹⁶⁷ According to one ethnic German from Katharinenthal, a Volksdeutsche village less than five kilometers to the east of Speyer, shortly after the arrival of the Einsatzkommando, he and nine other local ethnic Germans received orders to report to Speyer. Speyer's local German commander informed him and his compatriots that they were to deliver any Jews that they found to the SD. Using this protean ethnic German auxiliary force, over the coming weeks Einsatzkommando 12 murdered the area's entire Jewish population in an outlying cemetery and at the edge of a nearby anti-tank ditch.¹⁶⁸

One can best describe the initial reactions of the local ethnic Germans to the Einsatzgruppe as ambivalent. While there does not appear to be any evidence of direct ethnic German participation in the shootings, their assistance was crucial to the success of the mission. First, lacking the biographical information necessary to select victims, the

¹⁶⁵ Barch, B 162/2215/249. The nomadic nature of German control exerted by Einsatzgruppe D appeared in other ethnic German settlements. In Selz, for example, the ten-man team from Einsatzkommando 11b occupied the town for three weeks shortly after the German military passed through the village. Barch, B 162/2315/321. Buchsweiler, *Volksdeutsche in der Ukraine*, 319. Likewise, German Einsatzkommandos were not the only units that operated behind the frontlines. According to one witness, Romanian forces likewise captured and deported local Jews. Barch, B 162/2315/322.

¹⁶⁶ Barch, B 162/2215/247-49.

¹⁶⁷ Buchsweiler, *Volksdeutsche in der Ukraine*, 376.

¹⁶⁸ Barch, B 162/2215/258-59.

leaders of the Einsatzkommando turned to the local village's ethnic German mayor, who helped the unit choose its targets. Second, although further research is necessary, at least some ethnic German residents assisted in guarding the victims during the march to the two execution sites that Einsatzkommando 12 employed, and then in burying the bodies. Third, as had become increasingly common, the local Volksdeutschen were the material beneficiaries of the massacre in that the Einsatzkommando distributed the property of the recently murdered Jews to area ethnic Germans.¹⁶⁹ That said, the support of the ethnic German community was by no means universal. Anecdotal evidence indicates that ethnic Germans individually opposed the actions of the Einsatzkommando and even hid Jews from their would-be murderers.¹⁷⁰ Thus, it appears that an active Volksdeutsche minority in and around Speyer assisted the Einsatzkommando in its bloody mission, whereas an ethnic German majority tepidly acceded to the murder of the local Jewish community.¹⁷¹

In discussing the bloody campaign of the Einsatzgruppen in the Soviet Union and particularly in the Transnistria, it is important to remember that, in addition to murdering communists, Jews, and partisans, Einsatzgruppen were also responsible for eliminating racial and political enemies within ethnic German communities. Once they had racially

¹⁶⁹ Following the German massacre at Babi Yar outside of Kiev in September 1941, local ethnic Germans received over a hundred truckloads of the victims' clothing and personal effects. Buchsweiler, *Volksdeutsche in der Ukraine*, 372. Similarly, during Operation Reinhard, beginning in 1942, SS officials gave booty taken from Jewish victims to the Ethnic German Liaison Office for distribution to Volksdeutsche. Lumans, *Himmler's Auxiliaries*, 203.

¹⁷⁰ Fleischhauer, *Das Dritte Reich und die Deutschen in der Sowjetunion*, 111-13.

¹⁷¹ Social psychologist Ervin Staub describes these types of bystanders as "semiactive participants." Ervin Staub, "The Psychology of Bystanders, Perpetrators, and Heroic Helpers," in *Understanding Genocide: The Social Psychology of the Holocaust*, ed. Leonard S. Newman and Ralph Erber (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 25.

and politically “purified” these Volksdeutschen settlements, Einsatzgruppe D, like the German Army, attempted to provide temporary relief to surviving ethnic Germans and to begin mobilizing them for Nazi Germany’s “war for race and space.”¹⁷² In Speyer, as in numerous other settlements, this “decontamination” took on the form of murdering local ethnic Germans whom their neighbors denounced as communists. One Volksdeutscher auxiliary, who assisted the Einsatzkommando in Speyer, explicitly remembered burying the bodies of ethnic Germans who had allegedly assisted Soviet authorities in deporting other members of the community.¹⁷³ In Worms members of the Einsatzgruppe murdered six Volksdeutschen in addition to more than a dozen local Jews at the nearby airfield. According to the denunciations of local Volksdeutsche, these communists purportedly had collaborated with Soviet officials in deporting members of their community to Siberia during the 1930s. In Lichtenfeld, located approximately eighty-five kilometers northwest of Nikolaev, local ethnic Germans explicitly denounced local Volksdeutsche communists as retribution for supposedly denouncing members of the community to Soviet officials in 1936. Members of the responsible SD (*Sicherheitsdienst*) unit quickly murdered both alleged communists, the erstwhile ethnic German mayor of Lichtenfeld and his close friend, the local Jewish schoolteacher.¹⁷⁴ As was Einsatzgruppe D’s *modus operandi* in the Transnistria’s Volksdeutschen communities during the late summer of

¹⁷² Buchsweiler, *Volksdeutsche in der Ukraine*, 15. Gerhard Weinberg frames the Second World War for Germany as a combination of the “doctrine of race” and the “doctrine of space.” Gerhard L. Weinberg, *The Foreign Policy of Hitler's Germany: Diplomatic Revolution in Europe, 1933-36* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970), 2-3.

¹⁷³ Barch, B 162/2315/251-53.

¹⁷⁴ Barch, B 162/2315/124,171, 211.

1941, German officials used information provided by local Volksdeutschen to identify and to murder individuals—Jews as well as other ethnic Germans—whom they deemed to be the regime's racial and political enemies.¹⁷⁵

In targeting its victims, Einsatzgruppe D depended not only on denunciation from local ethnic Germans, but also on the complicity of the German Army. For example, on August 17, 1941, the Volksdeutsche residents of Selz denounced Peter Schumsky to the German Army's Secret Field Police (*Geheime Feldpolizei*).¹⁷⁶ Schumsky, whom German officials identified as an ethnic German, allegedly had assisted Soviet authorities in deporting thirteen villagers across the Bug River to Nikolaev prior to the arrival of German forces. During his interrogation the following day, the Secret Field Police learned that not only was Schumsky married to a Russian, but also that he had joined the Communist Party five months earlier. After declaring him guilty of assisting Soviet authorities, the Secret Field Police turned Schumsky over to the SD Sonderkommando 10a, which executed him two days after his initial arrest.¹⁷⁷ This episode illustrates not only the complicity of both local Volksdeutsche and the German Army in Einsatzgruppe

¹⁷⁵ Prior to the establishment of direct control by Special Command Russia, in the late summer of 1941 elements of Einsatzgruppe D perpetrated a similar shooting in Neudorf, an ethnic German community fifty kilometers to the northwest of Odessa. The victims were both local Jews and local ethnic German communists. *Barch*, B 162/2315/275.

¹⁷⁶ As Paul A. Brown argues convincingly, despite its postwar claims of an apolitical, army unit that was closely associated with Admiral Wilhelm Canaris's anti-Nazi efforts, the Secret Field Police was heavily implicated in the crimes of the Nazi regime. Paul B. Brown, "The Senior Leadership Cadre of the Geheime Feldpolizei, 1939-1945," *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* 17, no. 2 (2003): 278-304.

¹⁷⁷ Angrick, *Besatzungspolitik und Massenmord*, 267.

D's efforts to bring Nazi Germany's new racial order to the Transnistria, but also the speed with which the region's new rulers murdered some ethnic Germans.¹⁷⁸

Given the importance of denunciations in each of these episodes, it is useful to contrast briefly the specific circumstances that surrounded denunciation in the Transnistria with those in Germany. Over the past decade and a half, studies by Robert Gellatley, Eric Johnson, and others have illustrated the importance of denunciations to the Gestapo's effectiveness in Germany.¹⁷⁹ Although the centrality of denunciation to Einsatzgruppe D's murderous mission in the Transnistria adds an interesting dimension to this scholarship, it is important to note that both organizations responded differently to denunciations. Whereas after a denunciation the Gestapo in Germany could launch an investigation into the merits of the claim, such a luxury was not possible for Einsatzgruppe D in the Transnistria. While further study of the pattern of ethnic German denunciations in the Transnistria is necessary, like denunciations to the Gestapo in Germany, the example of Lichtenfeld illustrates that personal animosity was a source of denunciation.¹⁸⁰ Despite the fact that the Gestapo in Germany was both aware of this

¹⁷⁸ As Angrick aptly concludes, this instance is representative of a broader pattern that played out across the Transnistria's ethnic German communities. *Ibid.*, 269.

¹⁷⁹ Robert Gellatley and Eric A. Johnson point to the fact that denunciation was crucial for the Gestapo to operate. See Robert Gellatley, *The Gestapo and German Society: Enforcing Racial Policy 1935-1945* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990).; Eric A. Johnson, *Nazi Terror: The Gestapo, Jews, and Ordinary Germans* (New York: Basic Books, 2000).

¹⁸⁰ Volksdeutsche in other regions also carried out personal vendettas under the aegis of Nazi Germany's broader murderous program. Members of the ethnic German militia in Poland, for example, often murdered Jews because of pecuniary interest and personal animosity without fear of punishment from German authorities. Fritz Bauer, ed., *Justiz und NS-Verbrechen. Sammlung deutscher Strafurteile wegen nationalsozialistischer Tötungsverbrechen 1945-1966*, 22 vols., vol. 7 (Amsterdam: University Press Amsterdam, 1968), 395-411. Bauer, ed., *Justiz und NS-Verbrechen*, 20:7-11. Also see Dean, *Collaboration in the Holocaust*, 167.

problem and often capable of distinguishing between these types of complaints, their colleagues stationed in the Transnistria during the late summer of 1941 had no such capacity.¹⁸¹ Lacking both the language skills and an intimate knowledge of the area, members of Einsatzgruppe D depended upon sympathetic local Volksdeutsche as cultural and linguistic intermediaries—precisely the individuals who denounced their neighbors as Jews and communists. Second, with the exception of crimes committed at the twilight of Nazi rule, the Gestapo in Germany rarely carried out public summary executions. By contrast, Einsatzgruppe D's explicit purpose was to sort and murder the regime's racial and political enemies soon after the German invasion of the Soviet Union. Therefore, unlike the Gestapo in Germany, Einsatzgruppen personnel in the Transnistria largely accepted uncritically ethnic German denunciations and murdered the alleged offenders almost immediately. In doing so, Einsatzgruppe D's genocidal activities established the foundations for the brutal and arbitrary nature of German rule in the Transnistria's Volksdeutschen settlements.

The Transnistria's New Nazi Order

Prior to examining the policies that Special Command Russia implemented during the German occupation, it is useful to probe briefly the biographies of the unit's SS officers. To execute these lofty plans, Lorenz chose two of the most ideologically committed and zealous SS-officers in the Ethnic German Liaison Office—SS-Brigadier General

¹⁸¹ Like the relationship between the Gestapo and Germans, Nazi officials in conquered lands depended so heavily on Volksdeutschen assistance that they did not often risk alienating their helpers by curtailing abuse. Gellately, *The Gestapo and German Society*, 143. In some contexts where Volksdeutsche abuse became rampant, central German authorities did try to check flagrant corruption. Bauer, ed., *Justiz und NS-Verbrechen*. 19:648.

(*Brigadeführer*) Horst Hoffmeyer and his assistant SS-Lieutenant Colonel (*Obersturmbannführer*) Dr. Klaus Siebert. A Volksdeutscher originally from Posen, Hoffmeyer served in the *Freikorps* during the interwar period and later joined the SS. Early in his SS career Hoffmeyer performed unknown “special services” for the Nazi Party so sensitive that they went unlisted in his secret personnel file. Hoffmeyer likewise participated in the Polish campaign by working undercover in Poland prior to September 1939. A member of the Ethnic German Liaison Office since at least early 1939, Hoffmeyer’s murky past and access to sensitive information has led scholars like Lumans to speculate that he was a secret member of the SS’s intelligence service, the SD. During the Ethnic German Liaison Office’s resettlement programs between 1939 and 1941, Hoffmeyer was ubiquitous, first overseeing the transportation of Baltic ethnic Germans from Riga, then working in Poland, and finally flying to Moscow with the German delegation to negotiate the resettlement of Volksdeutschen from Bessarabia. Lumans aptly concludes that, as the Ethnic German Liaison Office’s primary troubleshooter, Hoffmeyer was one of its most vigorous and dedicated officers.¹⁸²

Similarly, Klaus Siebert, an overt member of the SD, provides “a fascinating glimpse into the background of an energetic, fanatical, career SS man.”¹⁸³ Born January 25, 1903, near Zalle, Siebert studied at the Universities of Königsberg and Breslau during the 1920s. An engineer by profession, Siebert joined the Nazi Party in 1932 and the SS in 1935. In 1935, Siebert also began work at a precursor organization to the infamous Reich Security

¹⁸² Lumans, *Himmler's Auxiliaries*, 56-57, 99, 149, 159, 172-73.

¹⁸³ *Ibid.*, 140.

Main Office (*Reichssicherheitshauptamt*) and joined the Ethnic German Liaison Office in November 1939.¹⁸⁴ There he served with distinction, receiving the War Service Cross, Second Class with Swords in 1943.¹⁸⁵ As Hoffmeyer's May 1944 evaluation of Siebert indicates, the latter also had extensive experience in ethnic German resettlement actions in Soviet-occupied Poland, the General Government, and Bessarabia.¹⁸⁶ Put simply, Lorenz selected two of his most qualified, ideologically committed officers to prepare this long-sought-after population for Nazi Germany's race war in the East.

This same type of ideological zeal was also reflected in Special Command Russia's mid-ranking officers. Although additional research into the individual Regional Commands is necessary, one clear feature is the prominence of ethnic Germans as Regional Commanders and as members of the Regional Command staff.¹⁸⁷ The Regional Commander of Hoffnungsthal, for example, was a Romanian ethnic German from Bessarabia.¹⁸⁸ His command of Romanian made him an invaluable participant in Special Command Russia's interactions with the Transnistria's Romanian rulers. In the captain's

¹⁸⁴ *Barch*, B 162/2315/230-31.

¹⁸⁵ *Barch*, B 162/2315/145, 150-51.

¹⁸⁶ *Barch*, B 162/2232/101-2.

¹⁸⁷ One former SS officer recalled that many ethnic Germans worked in the Regional Command in Odessa. *Barch*, B 162/2294/175-6. In light of the high ethnic Germans composition of the Einsatzgruppen, the *Abwehr* (German Military Intelligence) and the elite "Brandenburg" Regiment, it is evident that Volksdeutsche personnel in German uniform contributed greatly to both the German war effort and its occupation of the Soviet Union. Fleischhauer, *Das Dritte Reich und die Deutschen in der Sowjetunion*, 91, 101. Buchsweiler, *Volksdeutsche in der Ukraine*, 300-5.

¹⁸⁸ *Barch*, B 162/2232/121. Likewise, his NSKK assistant lived in Russia until the age of fourteen and spoke Russian. *Barch*, B 162/2315/291.

SS personnel file, his superiors lauded him as “one of the most diligent men in our ranks, highly valued as a person, an SS-man, and a comrade.”¹⁸⁹ This sterling recommendation, which was part of a broader effort to obtain an estate for him in West Prussia, was no doubt due to his political convictions. As a National Socialist who worked in Romania until 1932, he eventually immigrated to Germany and, as a reward for his support, Himmler elevated him to the rank of captain in the SS. Thus, like Hoffmeyer and Siebert, the numerous mid-level ethnic Germans who staffed Special Command Russia in the Transnistria were ideologically-driven Nazis.¹⁹⁰

In addition to their general political orientation, the Manichean racial and political territory that the Transnistria’s Volksdeutsche inhabited in the eyes of Special Command Russia’s officers was a product of the SS’s broader policy toward Soviet ethnic Germans. Notwithstanding Nazi rhetoric of the Volksdeutschen as the racial seeds for German domination in Eastern Europe, the Soviet Union’s ethnic Germans remained a politically and racially suspect population.¹⁹¹ Less than two months after the invasion of the Soviet Union, the office of the Reichsführer-SS issued orders for the formation of indigenous auxiliary forces in occupied Soviet territory. These directives explicitly forbade calling up any “so-called ethnic Germans” who had had the opportunity to immigrate to Germany prior to the war, but yet chose to remain on Soviet soil. For these ethnic Germans, who “did not follow the call of the Führer,” the SS had “a different treatment”

¹⁸⁹ *Barch*, B 162/2232/121.

¹⁹⁰ *Barch*, B 162/2232/121.

¹⁹¹ Authors writing about ethnic Germans under Nazi control contend that German officials routinely treated the former as second-rate Germans. Bergen, “The *Volksdeutsche* of Eastern Europe,” 108.

in mind.¹⁹² Although these grim regulations did not apply specifically to the Transnistria's Volksdeutsche population, for whom immigration prior to the war was generally not possible, they do offer insight into the mindset of German occupation officials. For the SS, the Soviet Union's ethnic Germans were thus either the new order's active supporters or its enemies.¹⁹³

Following Einsatzgruppe D's ephemeral presence in the Transnistria, Special Command Russia, which was responsible for establishing permanent rule over the area's ethnic Germans, expanded and intensified the twofold mission of ensuring Volksdeutsche welfare as well as their political and racial "purity."¹⁹⁴ One of Special Command Russia's initial tasks was providing economic aid, which local Volksdeutsche desperately needed after decades of Stalin's rule. Caring for an estimated 130,000 ethnic Germans spread across Odessa and the 230 disparate settlements in the Transnistria was one of Special Command Russia's most pressing challenges.¹⁹⁵ As mentioned above, in an area

¹⁹² *Abteilung Militärarchiv, Bundesarchiv* / RW 41/4 / 31.7.41 / "Betr. 'Schutzformationen' in den neubesetzten Ostgebieten." / 2.

¹⁹³ In practice, these guidelines were not rigidly followed in occupied territories. For example, S.F., a Baltic German woman from Riga, did not suffer any apparent negative consequences for not relocating to Germany in 1940. During the course of the occupation, she worked as a translator for German authorities. In addition to her language skills, German officials likely found her personal and familial background attractive. She not only passed the German *Abitur* after completing the German *Gymnasium* in Riga, but also her father was a leading Lutheran pastor and theologian with a German doctoral degree. In addition, her older brother served as a Waffen-SS officer.

¹⁹⁴ The focus of the Hoffnungsthal Regional Commander's glowing recommendation was a list of his humanitarian achievements in the Transnistria. *Barch*, B 162/2232/120-21. A similar unit that operated in Ukraine was the *Sonderkommando Stumpp*, led by Dr. Karl Stumpp, a Volksdeutscher originally from Alexanderhilf near Odessa. Stumpp's command was responsible for filing detailed reports about the state of ethnic German villages in Ukraine. Schmaltz and Sinner, "The Nazi Ethnographic Research of Georg Liebbrandt and Karl Stumpp in Ukraine," 31.

¹⁹⁵ T175/72/2589159.

ravaged first by collectivization, famine, and deportation, and then by the violence of the opening weeks of the Second World War, German planners appreciated the threat to the biological building blocks of the new Aryan order in the East. As well as redistributing the property of murdered Jews and communists to ethnic Germans, Special Command Russia assigned the best collective farmland to Volksdeutschen and equipped them with salvaged equipment from erstwhile Machine Tractor Stations.¹⁹⁶ Special Command Russia likewise returned land to ethnic Germans that Soviet authorities had expropriated during collectivization.¹⁹⁷ In addition to encouraging German firms to build factories in the Transnistria, Special Command Russia even toyed with the idea of relocating a textile plant from Belgium to the Transnistria to develop the region industrially.¹⁹⁸ By July 1942 Hoffmeyer could proudly announce to Alexianu, that he had secured agreements with the German firms Bremer Handelsgesellschaft für Transnistrien, Bernhard Küpker und Co., Hansing Philippi, G.m.b.H., Wedanko, and Andreae Noris Zahn, A.G. to begin operating in the Transnistria's ethnic German settlements.¹⁹⁹

Given the exigencies of the Second World War, Special Command Russia attempted to establish an impressive social infrastructure for the Volksdeutschen of the Transnistria. Its 214 schools—nearly one per village—accommodated the region's more than 22,000

¹⁹⁶ Lumans, *Himmler's Auxiliaries*, 246.

¹⁹⁷ Barch, B 162/2297/93.

¹⁹⁸ Lumans, *Himmler's Auxiliaries*, 246.

¹⁹⁹ Jean Ancel, *Transnistria, 1941-1942*. 3:1595. Interestingly, Special Command Russia often came into conflict with Romanian occupation officials by classifying many businesses as belonging to ethnic Germans, and thus confiscating them for its own use. Angrick, *Besatzungspolitik und Massenmord*, 278.

students. Special Command Russia also operated eighteen kindergartens for the area's some 1,200 ethnic German youngsters and founded a teacher-training institute to provide for the 648 instructors. Furthermore, Special Command Russia took particular care with medical provisions for its ethnic German charges. It maintained seven hospitals, nineteen ambulances, a pharmacy and thirteen doctors, nine of whom were ethnic Germans. Special Command Russia likewise established ninety-two special stores that were open exclusively to German or Volksdeutsche customers.²⁰⁰ In many cases, Special Command Russia also distributed rations directly to ethnic Germans, and specifically much-sought-after staples like cigarettes, matches, sugar, salt, and distilled alcohol.²⁰¹ The Transnistria's SS commanders even provided for the entertainment needs of the local Volksdeutschen by organizing film evenings.²⁰² In addition, Special Command Russia printed its own newspaper entitled *Der Deutsche in Transnistrien* (*The German in Transnistria*).²⁰³ Although the war prevented German authorities from implementing their plans fully, the Transnistria's ethnic Germans tasted briefly the fruits of Nazi Germany's racially-defined welfare utopia.

Not surprisingly, the Transnistria's Nazi masters established social services for the region's ethnic German communities with a clear political agenda. For example, Special Command Russia worked assiduously to provide appropriate spiritual guidance for the

²⁰⁰ T175/72/2589167.

²⁰¹ Barch, B 162/2297/93. Angrick, *Besatzungspolitik und Massenmord*, 281.

²⁰² Ibid., 265.

²⁰³ Ibid., 281.

region's ethnic Germans. Despite the fact that Dr. Georg Leibbrandt of the Ministry for the Occupied Eastern Territories banned civilian German clergy from entering the Reich's new Eastern European empire in keeping with a September 1941 Reich Chancellery order, the Transnistria, which did not fall under his purview, was not subject to these restrictions.²⁰⁴ As was the case with so many of Special Command Russia's later initiatives, the German military began the area's religious renaissance. Wehrmacht clergy, such as Pastor H. Roemmich, who returned to his home village of Worms and officiated as the local Lutheran minister until his unit continued its advance eastward, first helped to rebuild the area's religious establishment.²⁰⁵ Special Command Russia's success in this avenue of reconstruction was initially more limited. Based on Hoffmeyer's correspondence with Alexianu in March 1942, it appears that Special Command Russia had great difficulty in recruiting priests committed to building "an orderly Catholic church structure" in the area.²⁰⁶ Hoffmeyer's luck in attracting Lutheran pastors appears to have been better. Three months later, in June 1942, Hoffmeyer touted an agreement with the German Lutheran bishop in Romania, Wilhelm Staedel, who agreed to provide Special Command Russia with four ethnic German pastors destined for Volksdeutsche congregations in Odessa, Johannistal, Lichtenfeld, and Helenental.²⁰⁷

²⁰⁴ Ibid., 272. Doris L. Bergen, *Twisted Cross: The German Christian Movement in the Third Reich* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996), 53.

²⁰⁵ Buchsweiler, *Volksdeutsche in der Ukraine*, 332-34.

²⁰⁶ Ancel, *Transnistria, 1941-1942*, 920.

²⁰⁷ Ibid., vol. 3, 1455. Although Hoffmeyer's correspondence to Alexianu does not name Staedel, the latter served as bishop of the German Lutheran Church in Romania from 1941 until 1944. A Volksdeutscher like Hoffmeyer, Staedel was an ardent German Christian who maintained his racist views even after 1945. Bergen, *Twisted Cross*, 52, 227-28.

Given that Staedel was a leading figure in the German Christian movement (*Glaubensbewegung “Deutsche Christen”*), an organization that sought to meld National Socialism and *völkish* racism with Protestant Christianity, it is likely that Hoffmeyer sought to arrange politically appropriate spiritual guidance for his flock.²⁰⁸

Along with the litany of achievements that Special Command Russia boasted, it likewise listed four “German Houses” (*Deutsche Häuser*), which were cultural institutions, designed explicitly to disseminate Nazi propaganda.²⁰⁹ Hoffmeyer’s office was, in fact, so proud of its German Houses that it extended Alexianu an invitation to attend the June 14, 1942, opening of its newest facility in Odessa.²¹⁰ German officials likewise established ethnic German National Socialist organizations that mirrored the functions of their German counterparts. For example, Special Command Russia attempted to replicate the Hitler Youth (*Hitlerjugend*) as the German Youth (*Deutsche Jugend*), the Labor Front (*Arbeitsfront*) as the German Workforce (*Deutsche Arbeiterschaft*), and in place of the SA (*Sturmabteilung*) the German Squad (*Deutsche Mannschaft*).²¹¹

²⁰⁸ One should also note that a disproportionate number of Wehrmacht clergymen were German Christians. It is thus likely that German Army chaplains introduced the Transnistria’s ethnic Germans to the movement even before the arrival of Special Command Russia. Bergen, *Twisted Cross*, 58-60.

²⁰⁹ T175/72/2589167.

²¹⁰ Ancel, *Transnistria, 1941-1942*, 1428.

²¹¹ Barch, B 162/2288/14.

Special Command Russia's ideological agenda is perhaps nowhere more obvious than in the educational materials that it used in its ethnic German schools.²¹² In addition to requisitioning pens, pencils, and paper, Special Command Russia also ordered 2,200 copies of *Mein Kampf* and 200 copies of Alfred Rosenberg's *Parteiprogramm* (Party Program) as general instruction materials. Likewise, for biology class, Special Command Russia obtained 1,000 copies of Stämmeler's *Volk und Rasse* (People and Race).²¹³ Thus the SS's narrow racial ideology defined both the form of the Transnistria's Nazi welfare system and its beneficiaries.

In order to identify the proper racial recipients of the Nazi welfare state, Special Command Russia conducted a massive process of ethnic classification and registered the Volksdeutschen for ration cards.²¹⁴ With the failure of traditional markers of ethnicity like language to separate the racially damned from Hitler's chosen people, German government and Nazi party offices, like Special Command Russia, turned to a familiar and more readily measurable indicator—participation in Germany's genocidal projects.²¹⁵ Originally created in 1941 to rank West Prussia's Volksdeutsche population,

²¹² Special Command Russia interestingly purchased fifty copies of a publication entitled *Unterrichtsmethodik in mehrsprachigen Schulen* (Instructional Methodology in Multilingual Schools). The fact that teachers needed to learn multilingual instructional methods likely highlights to the quality of German that many of their pupils spoke. "Lieferung von Schulmaterial für volksdeutsche Siedlungen." T175/72/2589176. Hoffmeyer likewise complained about the quality of ethnic German instructors who were educated either in "Soviet institutions or by correspondence." Ancel, *Transnistria, 1941-1942*, 2:981. Perhaps in an effort to ameliorate this situation, Special Command Russia funded trips to Germany for the Transnistria's ethnic German instructors. Angrick, *Besatzungspolitik und Massenmord*, 281-82.

²¹³ "Lieferung von Schulmaterial für volksdeutsche Siedlungen." T175/72/2589176.

²¹⁴ Lumans, *Himmler's Auxiliaries*, 245.

²¹⁵ Bergen, "The *Volksdeutsche* of Eastern Europe," 117. Supposedly Adolf Hitler coined the definition of a Volksdeutscher, and a Reich Chancellery memo operationalized the definition as individuals who, by

but later expanded to include all German-occupied territories, the classification categories for the People's Census (*Volksliste*) laid the foundations for the bio-political sorting of all ethnic Germans.²¹⁶ Thus, following the guidelines provided by the Immigration Central Office (*Einwandererzentralstelle*) of the Ethnic German Liaison Office, Special Command Russia attempted to establish the degree to which the Transnistria's ethnic Germans "had held on to their Germandom."²¹⁷ Based on the definition that Special Command Russia employed, a third-class Volksdeutscher was an individual who was not of pure German ancestry and was married to a non-German. A second-class ethnic German was someone who, although a full-blooded German, was married to a non-German.²¹⁸ In order to be included as a true member of the *Volksgemeinschaft*—and thus as a first category Volksdeutscher—an ethnic German and his or her spouse needed to have had at least three German grandparents.²¹⁹ More importantly, he or she needed to

virtue "language and culture had German origins," but lived beyond the borders of the prewar German state. Quoted in Bergen, "The Nazi Concept of 'Volksdeutsche,'" 569. Given the pervasion of German language and culture among Eastern European Jews, the Nazi definition was never able to transcend religion, pseudo-scientific racism, and political affiliation as defining characteristics. Doris L. Bergen, "The 'Volksdeutschen' of Eastern Europe," 72. Bergen, "The Nazi Concept of 'Volksdeutsche,'" 574. Enforcement of this definition was so poor in some cases that a Jewish woman—an archenemy in the eyes of the Nazi regime—posing as a Volksdeutsche hid from Nazi death squads by working as a translator for German civil authorities in an occupied section of the Soviet Union. Fritz Bauer, ed., *Justiz und NS-Verbrechen*. 21:164.

²¹⁶ Classification and inclusion in the *Volksliste* were overseen by the Highest Court of Examination (*Oberste Prüfungshof*), which was headed by Heinrich Himmler. Bergen, "The Volksdeutsche of Eastern Europe," 104.

²¹⁷ "Auszug aus der EWZ-Anordnung Nr. 212 vom 27.9.43." T175/72/2589012.

²¹⁸ Angrick, *Besatzungspolitik und Massenmord*, 277.

²¹⁹ T175/72/2589012.

“have had participated actively in the racial struggle for the future territories.”²²⁰ In other words, one way for a Volksdeutscher to become a true German was if he or she murdered Nazi Germany’s racial and political enemies.²²¹

These classifications, which one Special Command Russia officer later described understatedly as “not completely schematically implemented,” had important and even life-threatening implications for the Transnistria’s ethnic German population.²²² For example, Himmler, in his capacity as Reich Commissar for the Strengthening of Germandom, severely limited the property rights of third-class ethnic Germans.²²³ Similarly, an auxiliary policeman from the Transnistria’s Neu-Amerika settlement recounted that because he lived with a Russian woman and spoke poor German, German officials did not classify him as a full-blooded German. As a result, his superiors assigned him particularly undesirable patrol duties.²²⁴ In addition, Volksdeutsche identity papers endowed the holder with the ability to travel outside of his or her home area.²²⁵ More importantly, as a former Special Command Russia officer concluded, “the

²²⁰ Quoted in Fleischhauer, *Das Dritte Reich und die Deutschen in der Sowjetunion*, 68.

²²¹ Bergen, "The 'Volksdeutschen' of Eastern Europe," 77-79.

²²² *Barch*, B 162/2295/174. Bergen likewise highlights the arbitrariness of Nazi ethnic German racial classifications. Doris L. Bergen, "Sex, Blood, and Vulnerability: Women Outsiders in German-Occupied Europe," in *Social Outsiders in Nazi Germany*, ed. Robert Gellately and Nathan Stoltzfus (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2001), 285.

²²³ “Der Riechkommissar für die Festigung deutschen Volkstums Stabshauptamt ... an den Oberpräsidenten der Prov. Oberschlesien.” T74/14/385744.

²²⁴ *Barch*, B 162/2315/110-11.

²²⁵ *Barch*, B 162/2315/214.

possession of a German identification card brought with it advantages because the [ethnic] Germans were better taken care of than the other ethnic groups.”²²⁶ Given that German policy starved Ukraine’s population during the occupation, Special Command Russia’s regular shipments of food and access to exclusive German-only stores saved the Transnistria’s Volksdeutschen from malnutrition.²²⁷

This system, however, was often abused by non-Germans who illegally obtained either the green identification card of class one or two ethnic Germans or the blue identification cards of third-class Volksdeutsche.²²⁸ In fact, one Volksdeutscher in Odessa complained to occupation authorities that “in our city there are still many Jews with German or Russian passports and with passports of other countries.”²²⁹ By dint of these types of complaints, Special Command Russia took a keen interest in ensuring that ethnic German identity papers did not fall into the wrong hands. In the Lichtenfeld Regional Command, for example, the illegal transfer of identity papers turned deadly when a local ethnic German drunkard sold his documents to a Russian in order to purchase more alcohol. Because of this transgression, in mid-1942, the local Regional Commander ordered his execution.²³⁰ Put simply, an ethnic German’s identity papers were his or her ticket to life

²²⁶ Barch, B 162/2294/174.

²²⁷ Berkhoff describes the artificial famine that German occupation authorities created in Kiev. Berkhoff, *Harvest of Despair*, chapter 7.

²²⁸ Konrad Kwiest, "Statement of Konrad Kwiest in the Horst Wagner Trial," (Special Investigations Unit, Commonwealth of Australia (Author's Personal Collection), 1993), 9.

²²⁹ Ancel, *Transnistria, 1941-1942*, 1145.

²³⁰ Barch, B 162/2315/214.

rather than death—a matter so serious that German officials were willing to murder some members of the “master race” to ensure that their papers remained in the proper hands.

Despite Nazi rhetoric of the Volksdeutschen as the racial seeds for German domination in Eastern Europe, the Transnistria’s ethnic Germans remained a politically and a racially suspect population. According to Soviet and West German postwar testimony, throughout the duration of Special Command Russia’s control of the Transnistria, German officials labeled recalcitrant and hostile ethnic Germans as communists and murdered them throughout the region’s ethnic German settlements. For example, when an ethnic German Wehrmacht interpreter returned to his hometown of Neudorf on a multi-week leave in October 1942, he discovered that his mother’s twin brother, the former Soviet mayor of the village, was under arrest in the Regional Commander’s office.²³¹ When, at his mother’s urging, the interpreter approached the Regional Commander, the former learned that the auxiliary police planned to execute his uncle for deporting some of the village’s Volksdeutschen between 1933 and 1937. A few days later, members of the auxiliary police led the interpreter’s uncle to a vegetable garden half a kilometer outside of Neudorf and shot him along with two other prisoners.²³² In Selz, the auxiliary police began to suspect the former ethnic German mayor of having assisted the NKVD in deporting ethnic Germans during the 1930s. One day at lunchtime, the local Regional Commander stopped the suspect and ordered him into an armored car under the pretense that he had been instructed to relocate. A week later, villagers found

²³¹ This type of extended leave appears to have been typical for ethnic German translators serving with German forces. Zhitomir Archive 1182-1-35 / 9.4.43 / “Gend.-Geb. Kastin / Gen. Post Pogrebische.”

²³² *Barch*, B 162/2315/277.

his body in a nearby field, his face so mangled that his wife could only recognize him by the clothes that he was wearing.²³³ Given the small size of these predominantly ethnically homogenous villages—Selz, for example, had only three to four thousand residents—it is doubtful that German authorities could have concealed these murders from other ethnic German inhabitants even had they wanted to do so.²³⁴ The killings at Neudorf and Selz were, furthermore, not isolated. Rather, they illustrate a broader pattern of very public violence that Special Command Russia launched against the Transnistria's ethnic Germans.²³⁵

Ethnic Germans and Jews

Given that scholars writing on Eastern European ethnic Germans often assert that the latter's level of anti-Semitism was much higher than that of Reich Germans, it is useful to consider its importance in framing the overall context in which ethnic Germans chose to

²³³ *Barch*, B 162/2315/328.

²³⁴ *Barch*, B 162/2315/321.

²³⁵ *Barch*, B 162/2297/109. For example, similar incidents occurred in Alexanderfeld, Mannheim, and Rosenfeld. *Barch*, B 162/2315/275, 304-9. Similarly, late one night in December 1941, the local auxiliary police arrested the former Soviet ethnic German manager of the mill in Worms. Less than two weeks later, the local auxiliary police shot him at the edge of the Worms airstrip. *Barch*, B 162/2313/160. Likewise, in Hochfeld, the auxiliary police shot an ethnic German for shirking his military service. *Barch*, B 162/2315/225. Himmler required that Volksdeutsche listed in the first three categories of the People's Census perform compulsory military service. "Der Oberpräsident der Provinz Oberschlesien / Kattowitz, den 23. März 1942 / An die / Gauleitung der NSDAP" T74/14/385753. One should also note that Jews and ethnic Germans were not Special Command Russia's only victims. Under the guise of anti-partisan activities, Russians and Ukrainians were one prominent group of German victims. *Barch*, B 162/2315/142, 172-3, 305. Similarly, in the Lichtenfeld regional command, Special Command Russia also targeted gypsies. *Barch*, B 162/2315/220.

become killers.²³⁶ Although the observations that many scholars make about ethnic German anti-Semitism may apply to the Volksdeutschen in general, the impressionistic basis for these findings calls for a careful examination of ethnic German anti-Semitism in the Transnistria. Like their Ukrainian neighbors, the Transnistria's Volksdeutschen existed within a centuries-old heated, and periodically violent, anti-Semitic *milieu*.²³⁷ In its more recent manifestation, one common gentile stereotype in Ukraine immediately prior to the Second World War was that Jews controlled the Soviet regime—a construct that dovetailed with the Nazi struggle against “Jew-Bolshevism.”²³⁸ Some ethnic Germans unarguably subscribed to these views. As one rabidly anti-Semitic Volksdeutscher complained to German officials in Odessa in early 1942:

You, my dear German sirs, do not need to say much about the fact that the Jews are a dastardly spawn and that they are revengeful. If only a single Jew were to remain in the world, he would take the first opportunity to revenge himself against others. There are still so many of them in Odessa, and they will do everything to harm Germans and Romanians and to work for the Bolsheviks. There are cases in which Romanians take bribes from the Jews and release them. My dear German sirs, I ask you to heed my message—it contains the absolute truth. And therefore I ask you to bear down on and help the Romanians . . . cleanse the entire city of the Jews.²³⁹

²³⁶ Lumans, for example, suggests that “many of the Volksdeutsche of eastern Europe, particularly those living in the ‘Jewish Pale’ of southern Russia, eastern Poland, and northern Rumania, were probably more anti-Semitic than the average Reich Germans.” Lumans, *Himmler's Auxiliaries*, 29.

²³⁷ Amir Weiner, *Making Sense of War: The Second World War and the Fate of the Bolshevik Revolution* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2001), 271-75. Buchsweiler specifically argues that ethnic Germans in Ukraine existed within a “latent” anti-Semitic *milieu*. Buchsweiler, *Volksdeutsche in der Ukraine*, 242-43.

²³⁸ Weiner, *Making Sense of War*, 273.

²³⁹ Ancel, *Transnistria, 1941-1942*, 1145.

Although this type of anecdotal evidence indicates that some ethnic Germans were violently anti-Semitic, the question nevertheless remains what portion of the Transnistria's Volksdeutschen shared this view.

Notwithstanding the underlying Eastern European context in which the Transnistria's Volksdeutschen lived, the apparent rate of marriage between ethnic Germans and Jews indicates that these violently anti-Semitic views were far from universal. In their postwar interrogations, accused perpetrators repeatedly referred to the difficulty of executing Jewish spouses of ethnic Germans and their half-Jewish offspring. While it is difficult to make generalizations based on a handful of anecdotes, the frequency with which suspected ethnic German perpetrators recounted the murder of Jewish spouses and children of Volksdeutschen indicates how psychologically traumatic ethnic German murderers found these killings.²⁴⁰ As other studies of Holocaust perpetrators using postwar interrogations illustrate, perpetrators often referred to specific crimes only when they felt a particular connection to their victims.²⁴¹ Moreover, these ubiquitous references reflect the reality of the high rate of intermarriage between Jews and ethnic Germans in the Kutschurgan enclave of the Transnistria.²⁴² The reasons for this unusually high rate of intermarriage—a rate that perhaps dwarfed anything else in the former “Pale of Settlement”—were threefold. First, the Jewish community that lived in

²⁴⁰ Welzer examines the frequency with which Order Police Battalion 45 recalled the murder of children in their postwar interrogations. The author concludes that these memories were so prominent decades after the murders because the suspected perpetrators found these killings uniquely traumatic. Welzer, *Täter*, 174.

²⁴¹ Browning recounts the “quite unexpected and jarring” encounters between reserve police officers and German Jews in Poland. Browning, *Ordinary Men*, 153.

²⁴² Ancel, *Transnistria, 1941-1942*, 447.

and around Odessa, a cosmopolitan port city since the late eighteenth century, was historically highly assimilated and had myriad forms of contact with the region's gentiles.²⁴³ Second, the two decades of Soviet economic modernization prior to the Second World War brought men and women of disparate ethnic and religious groups into contact with one another in a way that would not have been possible a generation earlier and accelerated intermarriage.²⁴⁴ Third, the Yiddish-speaking Jews and the Volksdeutschen in the Transnistria shared a similar cultural and linguistic heritage. During hastily organized deportations, for example, Romanian and even German authorities were often unable to distinguish between the two groups.²⁴⁵ Likewise, the anonymous Volksdeutsche petitioner estimated that 50 percent of Odessa's "ethnic Germans" were actually Jews. As the author notes: "the majority of these Jews are able, thanks to their German-sounding surnames and accents, to pass as [ethnic] Germans."²⁴⁶ Thus, far from being "separated by their ethnic exclusivity and the region's culturally based anti-Semitism," the evidence from postwar judicial records suggests that the Volksdeutschen and the Jews of the Transnistria were unusually integrated.²⁴⁷ Both the rate of intermarriage between ethnic Germans and Jews, as well as the apparent difficulty

²⁴³ Steven J. Zipperstein, *The Jews of Odessa: A Cultural History, 1794-1881* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1985), 151.

²⁴⁴ Ancel, *Transnistria, 1941-1942*, 447. Buchsweiler comes to a similar conclusion. Buchsweiler, *Volksdeutsche in der Ukraine*, 234.

²⁴⁵ Ancel, *Transnistria, 1941-1942*, 447.

²⁴⁶ Ibid., 1145.

²⁴⁷ Lumans, "A Reassessment of *Volksdeutsche*," 91.

that many ethnic German perpetrators had in murdering Jews who were related to other ethnic Germans suggest that Volksdeutsche anti-Semitism in the Transnistria, while present, was far from universal.

Nazi Racial Policy and the *Mischlinge* of the Transnistria

While the murder of Jewish spouses and half-Jewish children of ethnic Germans does not illustrate a unique type of anti-Semitism, these killings do exemplify a uniquely violent SS racial policy in the Transnistria that dwarfed anything that the SS was able to achieve either in Germany or even in other areas of the occupied Soviet Union. In order to understand the radicalism of this policy, it is important to trace briefly the evolution of Nazi Germany's measures against Jewish spouses of "Aryans" and their *Mischlinge* offspring. From its very beginnings, Nazi *Mischlinge* policy was largely a product of conflict between German civil servants, who were concerned with the policy's potentially damaging effects on domestic and international opinion, and Nazi Party radicals, who sought to expunge all perceived Jewish influence from the body of the German nation.²⁴⁸ Although the 1935 Nuremberg Laws denaturalized Jews and outlawed marriage and sexual relations between Jews and "Aryans," Hitler was intentionally ambiguous about whether or not the laws applied to *Mischlinge*.²⁴⁹ In the ensuing debate between the Nazi Party and the German Interior Ministry, the party's racial experts advocated treating half Jews as Jews, whereas the Ministry proposed that they be regarded as a separate

²⁴⁸ Jeremy Noakes, "The Development of Nazi Policy Towards the German-Jewish 'Mischlinge' 1933-1945," *Leo Baech Institute Yearbook* 34, no. 291-354 (1989): 304-7.

²⁴⁹ Saul Friedländer, *Nazi Germany and the Jews: The Years of Persecution, 1933-1939*, vol. 1 (New York: Harper Perennial, 1997), 148.

category.²⁵⁰ In late 1935 Hitler ruled against the Nazi Party's racial experts and concluded that half Jews would only be regarded as Jews if they practiced Judaism or if they were married to a Jew.²⁵¹ Based on the supplemental decrees that accompanied the Nuremberg Laws in November 1935, Nazi Germany distinguished between full Jews and individuals with one or two Jewish grandparents, second and first degree *Mischlinge*, respectively, who were not practicing Jews.²⁵² Moreover, as highlighted by the annotation to each chart explaining the new ordinance in the 1936 *Organisationsbuch der NSDAP* (Organization Book of the NSDAP), that "existing marriages stay untouched," the Nazi Party banned using the Nuremberg regulation, which explicitly forbade mixed marriages, on existing unions for fear of public reaction.²⁵³

While sensitivity to German public opinion prevented the Nazi Party from expanding the legal definition of a Jew in Germany to exempt half Jews, both the Nazi Party and the German government had a free hand in the Soviet Union to develop and implement a much more radical policy than had been possible inside the Reich's borders. Although between August and November 1941, the Ministry for the Occupied Eastern Territories originally intended to use the definition provided by the Nuremberg Laws in the conquered Soviet Union, the difficulties of establishing Jewish ancestry in Eastern

²⁵⁰ Noakes, "The Development of Nazi Policy," 310.

²⁵¹ Friedländer, *Nazi Germany and the Jews*, 149. Noakes, "The Development of Nazi Policy," 312.

²⁵² *Abteilung Deutsches Reich, Bundesarchiv / RGBI. I / 1333-4*. (Hereafter *Barch R*)

²⁵³ Der Reichsorganisationsleiter der NSDAP, *Organisationsbuch der NSDAP* (Munich: Zentralverlag der NSDAP, 1936), 530-533. The unique category of "privileged mixed marriage" was responsible for saving many Jewish spouses of ethnic Germans from the Holocaust. Noakes, "The Development of Nazi Policy," 338. Friedländer, *Nazi Germany and the Jews*, 142.

Europe quickly became evident.²⁵⁴ At a Ministry for the Occupied Eastern Territories meeting in late October 1941, German officials simply suggested using current religious affiliation as a means of identifying Jews.²⁵⁵ From their perspective, Soviet “non-Jews” who practiced Judaism “should not be treated in anyway as though they were worthwhile.”²⁵⁶ In orders issued by Alfred Rosenberg, the Reichsminister for the Occupied Eastern Territories, presumably drafted in late 1941, the ministry articulated a compromise whereby all individuals with German or non-Soviet citizenship would be treated according to the Nuremberg Laws.²⁵⁷ For Soviet citizens, Rosenberg’s office noted, “Jewish Mischlinge of the first degree (half Jews) are understandably just as undesirable as full Jews,” and the Ministry placed both into the same racial category.²⁵⁸

Based on the directives that the Reichkommissar für Ostland circulated to his Reichskommissariat in November 1941, the changes authorized by Rosenberg had important practical implications for Nazi racial policy regarding non-German mixed

²⁵⁴ *Barch R / R 6/74* / “Verordnung über die Bestimmung des Begriffs ‘Jude’ in den besetzten Ostgebieten von August 1941“ / 35. *Barch R / R 6/74* / “Verordnung über die Bestimmung des Begriffs Jude in den besetzten Ostgebieten vom November 1941“ / 36. The practical difficulties that these regulations entailed were further discussed in a meeting in January of the following year. *Barch R / R 6/74* / “Besprechung am 29. Januar 1942 im Reichsministerium für die besetzten Ostgebiete Protokoll” / 77.

²⁵⁵ *Barch R / R 6/74* / “Aktennotiz ... über die Besprechung am 31. Oktober 1941 über die Frage der Fassung des Judenbegriffs in den besetzten Ostgebieten” / 37.

²⁵⁶ *Barch R / R 6/74* / “Aktennotiz ... über die Besprechung am 31. Oktober 1941 über die Frage der Fassung des Judenbegriffs in den besetzten Ostgebieten” / 37.

²⁵⁷ *Barch R / R 6/74* / “Der Reichsminister für die besetzten Ostgebiete“ / 10.

²⁵⁸ *Barch R / R 6/74* / “Der Reichsminister für die besetzten Ostgebiete“ / 13. Repeating these precise sentiments the following year, the Reichminister’s office further suggested that occupation officials could identify Soviet Jews by virtue of their common last names and apparent inability to pronounce certain Russian words. *Barch R / R 6/74* / “Bestimmung des Begriffs ‘Jude’ in den besetzten Ostgebieten.” / 61.

marriages in the occupied Soviet Union. First, unlike in Germany, there were to be no privileged gentile-Jewish marriages among the native population—the Jewish spouse was often simply expendable. Second, in the Reichskommissariat Ostland, occupation authorities were to make an explicit distinction between gentile-Jewish unions in which reproduction could and could not take place. Thus, if the Jewish partner agreed to divorce his or her non-Jewish spouse, the marriage’s half-Jewish children were to be treated as non-Jews.²⁵⁹ If, by contrast, the gentile spouse were unwilling to separate from his or her Jewish partner, both he or she and the offspring were to be treated as Jews. Regardless of whether or not the marriage had produced children, if the non-Jewish partner did not agree to separate, he or she was to be considered a Jew. However, one way in which a marriage with a gentile husband could remain intact was if the Jewish wife submitted to sterilization.²⁶⁰ Regardless of whether or not this alternative was actually feasible on the Eastern Front in the autumn of 1941, the explicit statement of this loophole indicates that these guidelines were intended to prevent future partially Jewish offspring rather than to eliminate all non-Jewish-Jewish marriages.²⁶¹ The justification for this change in policies was primarily racially-driven. As Dr. Bernhard Lösener, desk officer for racial affairs in the Interior Ministry, stated half-Jews with no German blood

²⁵⁹ Central State Archive Riga 1026.1.3 / 1.11.41 / “Behandlung der juedischen Mischehen” / 156-57. (Hereafter CSA).

²⁶⁰ Not surprisingly, this loophole was gendered. Whereas the directives list sterilization as an option for Jewish women married to gentile husbands, they do not offer the same alternatives to gentile wives married to Jewish husbands. The unstated assumption thus appears to be that husbands rather than wives determined their marriage’s identity. CSA / 1026.1.3 / 1.11.41 / “Behandlung der juedischen Mischehen” / 156-57.

²⁶¹ CSA / 1026.1.3 / 1.11.41 / “Behandlung der juedischen Mischehen” / 156-57.

were inherently less racially valuable than half-German *Mischlinge*.²⁶² Without the moderating concerns of domestic public opinion, both the German state and the Nazi Party fashioned more radical policies against non-German *Mischlinge* and mixed marriages in the occupied Soviet Union than would have been possible in Germany.

Thwarted in 1935 by the Interior Ministry, the SS returned to the issue of *Mischlinge* in Germany at the Wannsee Conference in late January 1942.²⁶³ In the meeting that was to seal the fate of European Jewry, Reinhard Heydrich rearticulated the Party's stance in 1935 and proposed that first degree *Mischlinge* should "in view of the Final Solution be equated with Jews."²⁶⁴ As they had done more than five years earlier, German governmental ministers blocked his proposals by arguing that such a policy could lead to "a disturbance of the population."²⁶⁵ Heydrich's efforts therefore remained stillborn because of fears of a potential popular backlash.²⁶⁶ Thus, although the Nazi regime was

²⁶² *Barch R / R 6/74* / "Aufzeichnung ... über den Verlauf der Besprechung am 29. Januar 1942 im Reichsministerium für die besetzten Ostgebiete" / 81-2. Given that Lösener had objected to expanding the definition of a Jew to include *Mischlinge* during the dispute over the Nuremberg Laws in 1935, this statement is particularly startling. Friedländer, *Nazi Germany and the Jews*, 149. Although, as Noakes argues, Lösener "was clearly in a weak position" at the meeting, the racial distinction between *Mischlinge* of German origin and those of Slavic origins indicates the degree to which he understood non-Germans as racially inferior and his willingness to contenance a unique policy toward *Mischlinge* in the Soviet Union. Noakes, "The Development of Nazi Policy," 343.

²⁶³ It is important to note that *Mischlinge* were subject to a variety of discriminatory measures between 1935 and 1942, particularly educationally and professionally. *Ibid.*: 321-8.

²⁶⁴ *Politisches Archiv des Auswärtigen Amts* / IIg 177 / "Besprechungsprotokoll ... an der am 20.1.1942 in Berlin am Großen Wannsee ... stattgefundene Besprechung über die Endlösung der Judenfrage" / 175. (Hereafter *PA-AA*).

²⁶⁵ *PA-AA Berlin IIg 177* / "Besprechungsprotokoll ... an der am 20.1.1942 in Berlin am Großen Wannsee ... stattgefundene Besprechung über die Endlösung der Judenfrage" / 180.

²⁶⁶ Ian Kershaw illustrates the degree to which the Nazi regime tapered its domestic policies in response to public opinion. Ian Kershaw, *Popular Opinion & Political Dissent in the Third Reich, Bavaria 1933-1945* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987).

willing to attack some non-German mixed marriages in the occupied Soviet Union, by early 1942 it was unwilling to apply the same guidelines to Germans inside of the Reich's borders.

As Nazi Party officials and German civil servants compromised over racial policy vis-à-vis mixed marriages in the Reich and in the German-occupied Soviet Union, Special Command Russia pursued an independent racial policy. Free from the objections of the German civil service and concerns over domestic popular opinion, the Transnistria's SS rulers were able to implement a racial policy that was far greater in scope and violence than any initiative that the Nazi Party proposed in Germany or in German-occupied territory. For example, in late September 1942, the Volksdeutsche German auxiliary police in Rastadt executed hundreds of Jewish forced laborers in the neighboring enclave of Neu Amerika only to discover that one of its intended victims was an ethnic German woman. When the SS-officer in charge of the operation met with this seemingly-misplaced ethnic German woman, she explained that Romanian authorities had arrested her husband, a Jewish dentist from Odessa, and because she had been unwilling to separate from her spouse, they deported her as well. The SS-officer then offered to return her immediately to Odessa with the caveat that her husband, who was also imprisoned in the barn awaiting execution, would have to remain. When she did not return to the SS command post the next morning, the local Volksdeutsche auxiliary police executed the couple along with the other Jewish captives.²⁶⁷ Whereas Heydrich never proposed murdering the Aryan spouses of Jews, and Rosenberg ordered the killing of only some

²⁶⁷ Barch, B 162/2313/74-6, 88-91.

non-German partners, Special Command Russia executed recalcitrant Volksdeutschen who were married to Jews without any apparent restraint if unwilling to separate.

Special Command Russia furthermore pursued a far more violent policy against the region's half-Jewish children and their ethnic German parents than would have been tolerated in either the Reich or in German-occupied territory. For example, like the episode in Worms, the local police offered another ethnic German woman in Selz a similar escape. Although an SD unit that swept the area in the late summer of 1941 murdered her Jewish husband, she and her half-Jewish children remained untouched until after SS authorities established the local Regional Command. Shortly thereafter members of the command post approached the woman and suggested that she distance herself from her children. When the woman refused, she and her children vanished. According to witnesses, the local auxiliary police either shot them outright or deported them to the Tiraspol ghetto.²⁶⁸ Similarly, shortly before the arrival of German forces in the summer of 1941, the Jewish head of the Worms collective fled with the retreating Red Army. His pregnant Volksdeutsche wife, whom he had left behind, subsequently gave birth. Shortly thereafter, the local SS-commander received word, presumably from other villagers, that the child's father was a Jew. When the SS-officer found the woman, he snatched the child away from her and killed it by smashing its head against the side of her wagon.²⁶⁹

²⁶⁸ *Barch*, B 162/2315/325.

²⁶⁹ *Barch*, B 162/2315/174. Similarly, in Selz, the auxiliary police arrested and murdered the local ethnic German musician's Jewish wife and two children. *Barch*, B 162/2315/325. Selz appears to have been a hotbed of violence against Jewish relations with ethnic Germans. *Barch*, B 162/2315/327. Similarly, in Bishofsfield, Romanian soldiers arrested an ethnic German's wife and their infant son. The Romanians released their prisoners to the local SS commander and the auxiliary police, who shot their victims later that day. *Barch*, B 162/2315/296-97.

Likewise, near the ethnic German settlement of Worms in 1942, the local Volksdeutsche auxiliary police unit arrested an ethnic German woman's Jewish husband who had worked in a local collective farm. A day later, the Worms auxiliary police imprisoned his three children. Within a week his wife found the naked corpses of her husband, her infant daughter, and her two stepchildren in an anti-tank ditch outside of town.²⁷⁰ As particularly indicated by the murder of ethnic German spouses, this evidence suggests that, in contrast to stated occupation policy in the German-occupied Soviet Union, in the Transnistria Special Command Russia sought to implement a racial policy that both targeted a broader portion of the population and attempted to use familial relations as a means of determining political reliability. Unrestrained by the necessity of having to coordinate with civil or military administrators, the Transnistria's SS rulers were able to use the marital relations of ethnic Germans to identify the commitment of ethnic Germans to Nazi racial standards, and thus the National Socialist cause with deadly consequences.²⁷¹

²⁷⁰ Barch, B 162/2315/174.

²⁷¹ Lower, *Nazi Empire-Building and the Holocaust in Ukraine*, 8.

CHAPTER IV CONCLUSION

The crimes of the ethnic German auxiliary police in the Transnistria were a product of both a short-term, opportunistic Romanian policy and a long-term SS effort to remake radically the fledgling colonies of Hitler's would-be "Garden of Eden."²⁷² By deporting most of Odessa's remaining Jews between December 1941 and the end of February 1942, the Romanian occupation forces pursued an expulsion policy in direct opposition to German plans. The prospect of thousands of typhus-infected Jews streaming through Volksdeutsche settlements into the Reichskommissariat Ukraine terrified German occupation officials. In German eyes, not only were these Jews a potential racial contaminant, but, more importantly during the winter of 1941-42, they posed an immediate public health hazard to the area's ethnic Germans. Romanian policy thus, likely intentionally, pressured the Nazi regime to murder the Transnistria's Jews far sooner than it had intended. As the only available personnel under German command in the Transnistria capable of killing on such a scale, the Volksdeutsche auxiliary police became an integral part of the Final Solution.

The reasons why an overwhelming number of ethnic Germans chose to commit murder in the winter of 1941-42 were largely a product of the situational factors created by Special Command Russia's policies. The world the Nazis fashioned in the Transnistria was one in which life or death often depended upon the notations of an overworked

²⁷² Ibid., 13.

functionary at the geographic periphery of Germany's ephemeral empire. Although for more than a generation scholars have noted this brutality against traditionally-recognized victim groups such as Jews, historians are only now beginning to recognize that ethnic Germans also felt the violent "ripple effects" of the Nazi worldview.²⁷³ Whereas other non-German perpetrator cohorts provided crucial manpower that Nazi Germany desperately needed for the Holocaust, they occupied immutable racial categories in the eyes of their Nazi masters. For example, a Lithuanian auxiliary, no matter how diligently he combated the regime's racial enemies, was not German and thus inferior. By virtue of their malleable position within the Nazi racial hierarchy, ethnic Germans occupied a nebulous position that they could help clarify through their own actions. The Nazi regime counted recalcitrant ethnic Germans, like the rest of its victims, as dangerous biological and political pathogens that needed to be eradicated from the body of the German nation.

The Manichaeian racial territory that ethnic Germans inhabited—either the regime's chosen children or its biological waste—is perhaps nowhere more apparent than in the occupied Transnistria under SS administration. In few other venues could the SS realize the Nazi *Weltanschauung* with so little restraint. When given the opportunity, the SS officers of Special Command Russia drew a sharp distinction between the region's "true" ethnic Germans and those individuals whom, by virtue of not embracing National Socialism, they slated for destruction. Nowhere was this uniquely radical racial policy more evident than in Special Command Russia's eradication of mixed ethnic-German

²⁷³ As Bergen aptly concludes, "Jews bore the full brunt of a worldview based on rigid ethnic and racial divisions, but the *Volksdeutsche* experienced some ripple effects of that ruthlessness." Bergen, "The *Volksdeutsche* of Eastern Europe," 109.

Jewish families. By contrast, for the chosen heirs of the master race, the SS attempted to establish a cradle to grave welfare system. Equipped with the very best that Germany could muster under the exigencies of global war, between 1941 and 1942 the Transnistria's ethnic Germans witnessed the beginnings of a veritable utopia of exclusive well-stocked food stores, hospitals, and schools, which contrasted sharply with their endangered position under the Soviet regime. For those ethnic Germans whom SS authorities found objectionable, the consequences were equally tangible—almost certain death. From the moment that Nazi officials set foot in the Transnistria as members of Einsatzgruppe D in the late summer of 1941 to the collapse of German rule in the spring of 1944, the SS and their ethnic German helpers murdered these “race traitors” alongside communists, Jews, Gypsies, and Slavs. Rather than a uniquely violent anti-Semitism, Nazi policy shaped the context in which the Volksdeutschen of the Transnistria formed their decision to participate in the Holocaust.

Furthermore, the underlying *milieu* that the SS constructed among the Transnistria's ethnic German communities created a situation that differed fundamentally from that of Germans living in the Third Reich. Unlike the “ordinary men” or “ordinary Germans” of Reserve Order Police Battalion 101, the Transnistria's Volksdeutschen lived within a context of extremes unmatched by the experiences of their German counterparts. Although German perpetrators could receive material benefits for their crimes in the form of career advancement or outright corruption, none of these benefits were proportionately as impressive as those that the SS presented to the Transnistria's compliant ethnic Germans. Likewise, although Germans who refused to participate in the Holocaust could face stunted careers in the Nazi system or the opprobrium of their peers, there is no

evidence to suggest that any were ever stripped of their “Germanness” and thus placed in physical danger for failing to support adequately National Socialism. By contrast, SS officials in the Transnistria routinely shredded the protective cloak of “Germanness” from uncooperative Volksdeutsche and exposed them to the regime’s violence. Although further research is necessary, these initial findings raise the tantalizing possibility that ethnic Germans could legitimately and perhaps did fear real physical consequences for failing to participate in the Holocaust. At the very least, the intensity, violence, and openness with which the SS attempted to “purify” the Transnistria’s ethnic German communities constricted the context in which ethnic Germans decided to murder in a way that differed fundamentally from that of Germans. Although the mechanisms that scholars have developed to explain perpetrator behavior remain central to understanding the Holocaust, the example of the ethnic German perpetrators in the Transnistria calls for a reexamination of the Nazi regime’s capacity to cajole and to coerce would-be perpetrators to murder its enemies.

APPENDIX

SOVIET JUDICIAL SOURCES

The preceding examination relies in part upon postwar Soviet investigations of suspected Holocaust perpetrators. Using postwar testimony in examining Holocaust perpetrators raises myriad issues about the reliability of the evidence. Not only do interviewees make their statements years after the events, but they often do so within the context of criminal investigations. In such situations, the suspects have little incentive to tell the truth. Although the Central Office for the Investigation of National Socialist Violent Crimes and the Dortmund local prosecutor's office conducted scores of independent interviews and interrogations in the Federal Republic of Germany related to the Transnistria's ethnic German auxiliary police, the statements taken by Soviet investigators largely, if not exclusively, provide the incriminating evidence. As this information is a product of highly politicized postwar Soviet proceedings against suspected collaborators, one must take special care both to articulate the potential limitations to the evidence as well as to provide a methodological framework in which to understand the information.

The politicization of its collaborator investigations was in large measure a product of the Soviet political memory surrounding the "Great Patriotic War." As Nina Tumarkin and Amir Weiner argue, Soviet victory during the Second World War functioned as a crucial legitimizing myth for the postwar political order.²⁷⁴ According to Weiner, the

²⁷⁴ Nina Tumarkin, *The Living and the Dead: The Rise and Fall of the Cult of World War II in Russia* (New York, NY: BasicBooks, 1994), 133. Amir Weiner, "Nature, Nurture, and Memory in a Socialist Utopia: Delineating the Soviet Socio-Ethnic Body in the Age of Socialism," *American Historical Review* 104, no. 4 (1999): 1127. Also see Weiner, *Making Sense of War*. Penter argues that the renaissance of Ukrainian nationalism after the collapse of the Soviet Union continues to make the existence of Ukrainian complicity in the Holocaust politically problematic. Tanja Penter, "Collaboration on Trial: War Crimes Trials in the Ukraine," in *The Holocaust in the Courtroom* (United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, Washington, D.C.: Unpublished, 2005), 2-3.

existence of Soviet collaborators after the war threatened the “purification and reintegration” that the myth sought to engender.²⁷⁵ The result of this challenge was an unparalleled ferocious persecution of former collaborators, particularly in Ukraine.²⁷⁶ For obvious reasons, the Soviet state explicitly targeted ethnic Germans as part of its punitive population policy. By the end of the war, the regime deported more than half of the country’s ethnic German population to Kazakhstan.²⁷⁷ Put simply, the Soviet Union’s drive to pursue and punish suspected collaborators, and particularly those from ethnic minorities, was on a scale and of an intensity that greatly exceeded anything seen in Western or Central Europe after the Second World War.²⁷⁸

Scholars, however, are only beginning to grapple with the veracity of these proceedings.²⁷⁹ The relative paucity of research using this material is largely a result of

²⁷⁵ Weiner, "Nature, Nurture, and Memory in a Socialist Utopia," 1126.

²⁷⁶ For example, by virtue of seeking collective responsibility for actions of collaborators, the Soviet Union relocated entire ethnic minorities, like the Chechens, whom the state suspected of complicity with the German invaders. Ibid.: 1127-28, 1137-39.

²⁷⁷ Polian, *Against Their Will*, 193.

²⁷⁸ Weiner, "Nature, Nurture, and Memory in a Socialist Utopia," 1135. On memory and national recovery in Western Europe, see Pieter Lagrou, *The Legacy of Nazi Occupation: Patriotic Memory and National Recovery in Western Europe, 1945-1965*, *Studies in the Social and Cultural History of Modern Warfare* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

²⁷⁹ The use of these sources is becoming a subject of increasingly scholarly interest. See Tanja Penter, "Collaboration on Trial: New Source Material on Soviet Postwar Trials against Collaborators," *Slavic Review* 64, no. 4 (2005).; Jeffrey W. Jones, "Every Family Has Its Freak': Perceptions of Collaboration in Occupied Soviet Russia, 1943-1948," *Slavic Review* 64, no. 4 (2005): 747-70.; Martin Dean, "Where Did All the Collaborators Go?" *Slavic Review* 64, no. 4 (2005): 791-98.; Pavel Polian, "First Victims of the Holocaust: Soviet-Jewish Prisoners of War in German Captivity," *Kritika* 6, no. 4 (2005): 763-7.; Karel C. Berkhoff, "The Mass Murder of Soviet Prisoners of War and the Holocaust: How Were They Related?" *Kritika* 6, no. 4 (2005): 789-96.; Marina Sorokina, "People and Procedures: Toward a History of the Investigation of Nazi Crimes in the USSR," *Kritika* 6, no. 4 (2005): 797-831.

the fact that the Russian Presidential Archive, which is inaccessible to scholars, houses most Soviet security service and military records. These Holocaust-related interrogations are unique in that Soviet and later Russian governments have been willing to disclose them. Researchers using these documents must therefore map a course through largely uncharted methodological waters before using these sources as historical evidence.

Thanks to the initial pioneering work of Tanja Penter, it is now possible to reconstruct some of the ways that the postwar Soviet political *milieu* influenced collaborator trials. First, the number of proceedings is large. Out of a postwar population of less than nine million in postwar Ukraine, between 1943 and 1957 the NKVD detained 200,173 suspects. Second, a disproportionate number of collaborator trials took place in western Ukraine. In 1946, for example, more than half (55 percent) of the 21,338 suspected Ukrainian collaborators were from western Ukraine, despite the fact that the region contained less than one quarter of Ukraine's population.²⁸⁰ Third, Soviet investigators disproportionately targeted ethnic minorities, such as ethnic Germans. Although ethnic Germans comprised 1.3 percent of Ukraine's population, in western Ukraine they accounted for nearly a quarter (22 percent) of suspected collaborators.²⁸¹ If one accepts Weiner's thesis that the Soviet Union's efforts to root out former collaborators was part

²⁸⁰ Penter, "Collaboration on Trial: War Crimes Trials in the Ukraine," 4.

²⁸¹ Ibid., 3-5. Although Soviet investigators disproportionately targeted ethnic minorities as suspected collaborators, the limited geographic focus of postwar investigations also led to a disproportionate number of ethnic German suspects. For example, despite the fact that ethnic Germans comprised less than two percent of the prewar Ukrainian population and only six percent of the Transnistria's population, Ukraine was home to 93 percent of the prewar Soviet Union's ethnic Germans and of these, a disproportionate number (40 percent) lived in the Kutschurgan enclave near Odessa. Buchsweiler, *Volksdeutsche in der Ukraine*, 14, 295. Fleischhauer, *Das Dritte Reich und die Deutschen in der Sowjetunion*, 117. By contrast, Soviet authorities deported the majority of ethnic Germans in Eastern Ukraine in August 1941. Polian, *Against Their Will*, 128.

of a broad internal “quest for purity,” then, as Penter argues, it was focused on traditionally suspect ethnic minorities in the Soviet Union’s relatively newly acquire territory in western Ukraine.²⁸² Moreover, given the geographic distribution of Volksdeutschen auxiliary units, this geographic focus likely reflects a plausible distribution of perpetrators. The ethnic Germans in the region around Odessa were therefore logically the precise ethnic and geographic cohort that the Soviet Union targeted in its postwar collaborator investigations.

Although little historical analysis of Soviet security services like the NKVD or the KGB exists, it is possible to create a skeletal summary of the proceedings against suspected collaborators. As Penter concludes, investigators charged the majority of suspected collaborators with war crimes under legislation enacted by the Supreme Soviet of the Soviet Union in April 1943. In addition, beginning as early as 1941, special military tribunals, which adjudicated cases based on Soviet criminal law, tried the majority of suspected collaborators. There were, however, two important differences. First, unlike conventional criminal courts, military tribunal trials could follow an indictment after only twenty-four hours, thus making it very difficult for the defendant to prepare a defense. Second, except for collaborators sentenced to death, there was no possibility of appealing the decisions of the military tribunals. Even when convicted collaborators escaped the death penalty, they were nevertheless subject to punishment of fifteen to twenty years of hard labor. Third, the use of “military tribunals” was not limited to the immediate postwar period. Rather, as late as 1988—at the twilight of the

²⁸² Weiner, “Nature, Nurture, and Memory in a Socialist Utopia,” 1120. Penter, “Collaboration on Trial,” 4.

Soviet regime—military tribunals in Kiev continued to issue death sentences against former auxiliary policemen.²⁸³ Given that the NKVD and later the KGB handled all of the investigations that were subsequently shared with West German prosecutors, it is likely that suspected ethnic German perpetrators during the late 1950s and 1960s appeared before military tribunals in Ukraine.²⁸⁴

Unlike highly publicized show trials during the late 1930s, proceedings against Ukrainian collaborators took place under a virtual media blackout. For example, of the 633 trials that took place between July and August 1943, only seven were open to the public.²⁸⁵ If, as Penter suggests, this silence was an effort to cover up the use of torture to extract confessions, then it appears that the use of physical and mental coercion was systematic.²⁸⁶ As one West German investigator noted in his post-interrogation report, prior to the Second World War the NKVD arrested the interviewee, brutally beat him with wooden and rubber batons during his interrogation, and sentenced him to ten years of forced labor in the Ural mountains without trial.²⁸⁷ The likely use of torture to extract

²⁸³ Dieter Pohl, "Ukrainische Hilfskräfte Beim Mord an Den Juden," in *Die Täter der Shoah: fanatische Nationalsozialisten oder ganz normale Deutsche?* ed. Gerhard Paul (Göttingen: Wallstein Verlag, 2002), 223.

²⁸⁴ Penter, "Collaboration on Trial," 4-7.

²⁸⁵ Ibid., 6-7.

²⁸⁶ Tanja Penter concludes, based on an examination of the documents available at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, that physical violence was used to extract information. Ibid., 12.

²⁸⁷ "Während der Vernehmungen sei er gefoltert (Schläge mit Holz- und Gummiknüppeln), ohne Gerichtsverhandlung zu 10 Jahren Zwangsarbeit verurteilt und in die Arbeitslager am Ural verbracht worden." *Barch*, B 162/2315/81-2.

information therefore remains one of the most methodologically problematic aspects of using these documents as a historical source.

In addition, based on an initial textual analysis, it appears that Soviet investigators composed statements attributed to confessed ethnic German perpetrators. In the course of their interrogations, the statements that suspects allegedly made contain a suspicious amount of official Soviet language. For example, confessing ethnic Germans referred to having to wear armbands “with the fascist symbol,” instead of using the term “swastika.”²⁸⁸ Likewise, they referred to themselves as “residents of the German nationality,” instead of simply as Germans.²⁸⁹ Furthermore, in describing his victims, one ethnic German perpetrator confessed to killing “peaceful Soviet citizens of the Jewish nationality.”²⁹⁰ Not coincidentally, in reexamining the death sentences for all eleven members of the Rastadt auxiliary police unit in 1967, the Supreme Court of the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic referred to “the annihilation of peaceful citizens of the Jewish nationality.”²⁹¹ Given that all of the ethnic German suspects had little formal education and that none were Communist Party members, it seems unlikely that they would have been able to speak the regime’s political language with such fluency. One

²⁸⁸ *Barch*, B 162/2313/27.

²⁸⁹ *Barch*, B 162/2313/74.

²⁹⁰ *Barch*, B 162/2313/22.

²⁹¹ *Barch*, B 162/2313/36.

must therefore recognize that these types of Soviet interrogations are a source that was heavily adapted, if not entirely composed by Soviet security service investigators.²⁹²

In light of these limitations, how can scholars employ this type of source as historical evidence? First, whenever possible, scholars should corroborate the information provided by Soviet interrogations with that available from contemporary sources.²⁹³ In the case of the Transnistria's ethnic German auxiliary police, both contemporary documents and postwar West German interrogations confirm its existence and indicate some of the details provided by Soviet interrogations. Furthermore, based on the work of recent scholars on the participation of Eastern Europeans in the Holocaust, the accounts provided by the Soviet interrogations fit an overall pattern.²⁹⁴

Second, scholars must take into consideration the context of the interrogations. All of the interrogations related to the Transnistria's ethnic German auxiliary police occurred after the 1956 Twentieth Party Congress and N.S. Khrushchev's "secret speech." Although particularly during the L.I. Brezhnev era, the Soviet state actively pursued a vigorous official memory of the "Great Patriotic War," by the late 1950s and 1960s the politicized nature of the proceedings had cooled somewhat. For example, despite the fact that the Soviet Union portrayed communists as the "supervictim" of fascism at the expense of European Jewry, the vast majority of victims to whom these interrogations

²⁹² Pentec, "Collaboration on Trial," 12.

²⁹³ Ibid.

²⁹⁴ Although Martin Dean's account deals largely with ethnic Ukrainian and Belarusian perpetrators, the Soviet interrogations support many of his overall conclusions. Dean, *Collaboration in the Holocaust*.

refer are Jews and are identified as such in the Soviet documents.²⁹⁵ In addition, as the case of the Rastadt ethnic German auxiliary police indicates, a sizable portion of the defendants were already convicted in the late 1940s, and by the late 1950s and 1960s were already serving lengthy prison sentences for collaborating with the Germans during the occupation.²⁹⁶ According to the indictment records, Soviet investigators reopened a murder investigation of individuals whom the state had either already investigated or convicted of collaboration on the basis of new evidence.²⁹⁷ Given the changed political climate of the late Khrushchev and early Brezhnev years, the fact that Soviet interrogators devoted such energy to establishing the culpability of a group of previously investigated collaborators for new charges of explicitly murdering Jews speaks to the fact that these investigations were likely not mere political trials.²⁹⁸ If anything, the specific

²⁹⁵ Tumarkin, *The Living and the Dead*, 121. The case of Soviet memorialization at Babi Yar, where German forces executed most of Kiev's Jewish community in September 1941, is particularly illustrative. In 1957, when Soviet authorities decided to commemorate the German occupation of Kiev, these plans coincided with the decision to level Babi Yar and to construct a dam and sports stadium over the quarry where the mass shootings took place. When the dam inexplicably burst in March 1961, Kiev's population claimed that Babi Yar was taking its revenge. Perhaps out of fear of the site's retribution, Soviet authorities finally built a memorial to the victims in 1976, which conveniently omitted the fact that almost all of the victims were Jews. It was only in October 1991—fifty years after the killings—that the newly independent Ukrainian government erected a memorial to the approximately one hundred thousand Jews slaughtered by the Germans. Tumarkin, *The Living and the Dead*, 122-24, 187.

²⁹⁶ Barch, B 162/2313/33-5.

²⁹⁷ Barch, B 162/2313/33.

²⁹⁸ As Jan T. Gross argues using similar sources, "the quality of evidence garnered from trial materials will, for a historian, very much depend on the intentions and thoroughness of the investigation and the manner in which the trial itself was conducted." Jan T. Gross, *Neighbors: The Destruction of the Jewish Community in Jedwabne, Poland* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), 11.

circumstances of the case suggest that there was little political motivation for investigators to pursue these charges.²⁹⁹

By dint of the *Sitz im Leben* of these investigations, can scholars trust the information as accurate? Using similar sources, Jan T. Gross contends that scholars should accept a “particular account as fact *until we find persuasive arguments to the contrary*.”³⁰⁰ While there are merits to Gross’s approach, in light of the above limitations, a more cautious methodology is in order. Although Soviet investigators vigorously examined the crimes of the Transnistria’s ethnic German auxiliary police in a seemingly apolitical fashion, they nevertheless refracted and composed witness statements through their own ideological lenses. Despite the fact that the underlying information is likely credible, scholars must understand and treat these interrogation “transcripts” as paraphrased statements written by Soviet security personnel. Moreover, the inherent imprecision of these types of sources, combined with the problematic circumstances under which suspects made their statements, makes conclusions about individual culpability difficult. Whereas these interrogations provide relatively little credible information about personal guilt, they contribute detailed information about the Transnistria’s ethnic German perpetrators as a group. With these important limitations in mind, the preceding thesis treats all Soviet interrogation “transcripts” as summaries written by well-informed Soviet investigators.

²⁹⁹ This is precisely the same conclusion that Gross comes to in his examination of the Polish trial records relating to the Jedwabne case. *Ibid.*, 12.

³⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 92. (Author’s italics).

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